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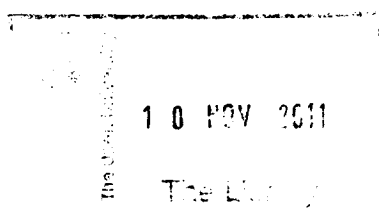
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Embodied Ethics and Contemporary Paganism



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Abstract

Contemporary understandings of ethics consistently situate them as the result of a focussed rational and intellectual process within a narrow range of academic and religious areas. I challenge this approach, and theorise an embodied approach to ethics as both possible and desirable. I argue that such an approach may be most easily located in the contemporary Pagan approach to environmental ethics, given that the rhetoric of Paganism valorises the body and privileges the natural environment. While I agree that Paganism is indeed a nature religion, I theorise that there are two simultaneous yet contradictory discourses of nature informing Paganism: the animist (privileging nature *qua* nature) and the esoteric (privileging a symbolic understanding of nature).

I assert that my qualitative fieldwork demonstrates that some Pagans have developed an embodied ethic through close relationship with nature. I acknowledge that the development of such a profound relationship requires considerable effort and a great deal of time. I then compare this against quantitative data from an online survey of self-identifying Pagans in order to establish the extent to which such an approach might be representative. The initial analysis of the online data supports the assertion that my respondents are likely to express positive attitudes to the environment, but are unlikely to participate in activism in relation to a number of specified areas. Deeper analysis compares the data between different groups identified along the animist/esoteric scale, and suggests that those Pagans who are more influenced by the animist discourse are

indeed more likely to express environmentally friendly attitudes and to take part in activism.

I conclude that such an embodied environmental ethic is possible, although this may be substantially contingent upon lifestyle. I posit that by understanding the diversity of discourses informing Pagan approaches to nature, academics may be able to more accurately interpret the diversity of Pagan approaches, and Pagans themselves may be able to move forward in discussions between their various traditions.

1.

Introduction

Until comparatively recently the existence of contemporary Paganism has been largely ignored by the academy. Following Luhrman's (1989) groundbreaking (yet still contentious) ethnographic work, a number of other academics from a range of disciplines have contributed important studies contributing to the development of a recognisable sub-discipline of Pagan Studies. This incorporates insights from a wide range of disciplines including Religious Studies, Archaeology, Sociology, Anthropology and History. A great deal of work has been done to situate contemporary Paganism within the spiritual milieu of post-modernism, and explain the attraction of its re-enchantment for twenty-first century western individuals. Nearly all the academic writing on Paganism, however, has been based entirely upon ethnographic, qualitative investigation. The focus has often been on small groups (Berger 1999, Blain 2002, Greenwood 2000, Letcher 2000, Salomonsen 2002, Wallis 2003), with some publications pulling together a number of different ethnographic and textual studies into a larger whole (Adler 1986, Berger, Leach and Shaffer 2003, Clifton 2004, Ezzy 2003, Harvey 1997, Lewis 1996). Other important contributions have been made from the disciplines of Theology (York 2003) and History (Hutton 1999). Only Adler (1986) and Berger, Leach and Shaffer (2003) have attempted any large-scale qualitative analysis, and both of these analyses were done in very general terms, seeking to survey of a few points of attitude.¹

¹ The upcoming "Pagan Census Revisited" (http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=WYCq4kaxG_2bYrJ8xnemeR3A_3d_3d) does include a deeper attempt to explore attitudes —

As my introduction to Chapter 6 will make clear, one result of this approach has been an almost universal emic and etic acceptance of a discourse that strongly identifies Paganism with nature. In March 2005, I was present when the then president of the Pagan Federation (PF), Amergin Og, gave a short extempore speech at the PF's Devon and Cornwall Conference in Tintagel. "Pagans", he said, "have a great deal to contribute to discussions about the environment". This utterance, delivered as though it were a universally shared axiom, proved to be one of those thought-provoking statements that worry away at one's peace of mind. It has haunted me because, rather like a *koan*, it set up a cognitive dissonance between the part of me which says: 'I know that this is a true statement' (accepting that Pagans do indeed have a great deal to contribute to discussions about the environment, as I've known lots of Pagans who are very green — who recycle, live low impact lives, or are vegetarians due to their spiritual commitment), and the other part which says: 'Hang on, that's rot — Pagans aren't particularly green', (as I've known plenty of Pagans to whom this applies as well). This entire project has grown out of that sense of dissatisfaction with an assumed *status quo*; an attempt to literally square the circle — because I've always understood at a profound level, that both those reactions are valid — a position that initially seems contradictory.

I do not seek to suggest that this strong identification between Paganism and nature is wrong *per se* — merely that its unquestioning acceptance, both by the academy and by many Pagans, gives rise to a difficult, complex, and frequently

although this includes only one, ten-part question on Politics, and only eight questions covering the same areas as my survey - with yes / no answers.

uncomfortable situation. It has frequently led to the construction of oppositional dichotomies of ‘different types of Pagans’, a divisive position which does not successfully describe the complexity of the situation. Like a mirrored labyrinth, this discussion rapidly becomes confusing and distorted; the world is turned upside down, quite obvious statements seem ridiculous, while the ridiculous becomes common sense. The widely held assumptions about Paganism (including the close relationship with nature) seem to melt away, and many forms of Paganism seem not, as we shall see, to be particularly Pagan after all. A slight sense of queasiness — of *Unheimlichkeit* — pervades this discussion. Some Pagans find themselves sometimes feeling subtly misrepresented without really being able to put their fingers on the reasons why. (Indeed many of my interviewees were nervous about describing themselves as Pagan for precisely this reason — that they didn’t want to be identified or understood as something they were not).

As someone who identifies as a Pagan, I have long been perplexed as to why other Pagans didn’t seem as concerned about some of the obvious shortcomings of the way that the community talked and wrote about things. In the books that I read, and in the conversations that I had, the questions that I was trying to find answers to were often elided — “Paganism has nothing to do with ethics”, said a very well known author, “it’s a spiritual practice”. When questioned about Pagan ethics, another very well known author discoursed for fifteen minutes about Aristotle, and when pressed talked (briefly) about the Wiccan Rede. On the rare occasions when Pagan authors did write about ethics, it was uniformly articulated solely in a magical context (“You shouldn’t put curses on people”), an approach frequently

linked to the rather anodyne statement of ethics known as the Wiccan Rede, (the benevolent sounding, but rather impractical — *"An it harm none, do what ye will"*), sometimes combined with a vague sense of some kind of karmic repayment from the universe. In some respects, it might be argued that such an absence might be beneficial — pressuring every individual Pagan to think long and hard about their own ethical approaches, agonising over every decision — but in practice this has hardly been the case. It almost seems as if Paganism has been ignoring the whole business of ethics, hoping that it is going to go away. I have never found this approach satisfying, yet at the same time have no desire to see Paganism saddled with the fundamentalist literalism that claims *"'An it harm none' can only be interpreted as a pro-life statement"*. I've always felt strongly that any way of being (whether you consider that a spirituality, religion, life-way, or world-view), that provides genuine fulfilment and spiritual nourishment needs to think about the way it relates to the Other, and that this, which is the core of ethics, is something that Pagans have skated around for too long. I contend that the tools that are needed to progress this discussion (particularly the common understandings of the nature of ethics, and the nature of Paganism itself) are often inappropriate, or just worn out and broken. My firm hope is that this thesis enables the discussion to progress a little further by providing some new tools: the possibilities of both a new way of doing ethics, and a new way of understanding apparent differences in Paganism. I will argue that a new way of understanding the relationship between Paganism and nature may do a great deal to clarify the situation, and to soothe the unease.

Aims and Objectives

The aim of this research project is to explore and test the idea of an embodied ethic; that is to say, an approach to ethics based upon direct embodied experience. Such an approach is novel, challenging the traditional ethical hegemonies of the rational theories of academia, and the revealed and interpretive approaches of religion. It also challenges the normative situating of ethics, moving it from the post-enlightenment emplacement within the purview of the isolated rational mind, to a new appreciation of the significance of the body: significantly a body that cannot be understood as isolated, but is profoundly immersed in a matrix of inter-relation. I constantly acknowledge that establishing and articulating such an approach is fraught with inherent difficulties (how can one *speak* about an ethic that arises through direct personal *experience*?), though I also explore possibilities that suggest that these difficulties are not insurmountable.

I theorise that one place where it might be easier to find evidence for such an embodied ethic is in contemporary Paganism, and particularly in its ethical relationship with nature. While Paganism itself is a complex and contentious construction, its public rhetoric emphasises that both the body and the natural world are of prime importance in many of the ways in which Paganism is defined, and in the experiences to which Pagans aspire. Thus I developed a number of objectives that would enable me to both discover, and to test evidence of, the existence and extent of an embodied ethic in the way that contemporary Paganism relates to nature.

The first objective with which I set out to achieve this aim was to situate the concept of an embodied ethic. Such an approach, stressing a pre-reflective experience as the basis for ethics, seems to be a radical departure from the normative understandings of western philosophy and its modernist dualisms. It can, however, be situated within the context of a considerable body of existing work. This contextualisation draws from the materialist tradition of western philosophy, process philosophy, the new animism, as well as the profound ethical insights of ecofeminism and Levinas's 'ethics of the other'. The second objective of this research was to perform qualitative research on a small scale in order to test whether or not there was, in fact, any evidence to suggest that such an embodied ethic might exist in some small groups within contemporary Paganism. I used both interviews (with some key opinion formers and members of an intentional community), as well as participant observation to gather data, which I argue is sufficient to support the assertion that an embodied approach to ethics may be used some of the time by some Pagans. My third objective was a quantitative survey of a larger Pagan population. This survey was intended to establish the extent to which it might be possible to map the qualitative results onto a larger, more general, Pagan community. Having carried out this work, the fourth objective was to draw conclusions from the comparison between the two kinds of research, and to reflect upon, and theorise explanations for similarities and differences. This has been achieved through the theorising of a sliding scale between different discourses of nature within Paganism, a theory that I was able to test by returning once more to the quantitative data.

Having begun by examining the ways in which this project emerges from what has gone before, the final objective must be to consider the ways in which its contributions may feed back in. There are two distinct ways in which this occurs. The first contribution that it makes is related to academia. This research takes the next step onwards from much theoretical work that has gone before. There has been a great deal of work done on embodiment, and this has consistently privileged the idea of inter-relation. A number of calls for an exploration of an embodied ethic have emerged from this theorising, and this research is an attempt to respond to those calls: to locate and articulate the practice of such an embodied ethic. It is also true that this research has important contributions to make to the discussions of ethics in contemporary Paganism (as well as making some inclusive contributions to the eternal dialogue about 'what a Pagan is'). My argument is one that empowers all Pagans to take part in dialogue about the nature of their ethics, without using a dichotomy that privileges the attitudes of one group over another, and simultaneously challenges them to reflect upon the ways in which their Paganism is lived out in practice.

Thesis Outline

Chapters 2 and 3 of my thesis are both literature reviews — each concentrating on one of the two broad areas that form the foundation for the rest of the work. Chapter 2 concentrates upon exploring the concept of embodiment — beginning with a critique of Cartesian dualism — and then outlining a number of significant components: Merleau Ponty's phenomenology of perception, de Quincey's radical naturalism, Lakoff and Johnson's primary metaphors, the 'new animism' of Ingold

and Harvey, and Holler's concept of an erotic ethic. Throughout this chapter, an important common theme that binds these ideas together is that of inter-relationship. Chapter 3 then explores the manifestations of such a relational current in environmental ethics: as different approaches (biocentric ethics, ecocentric ethics, deep ecology, and ecofeminism) progressively develop a wider inclusion in ethical consideration and the web of inter-relation. This process also considers the contributions of Levinas and Buber, before drawing the two chapters to a close by theorising an embodied ethic arising from inter-relation between the individual and the world. In both these literature reviews, the theme of inter-relation is paramount.

In Chapter 4 I bring together information from the literature reviews to identify the central argument that I intend to explore in my thesis: there is an embodied ethic, which enables certain individuals to make significant ethical life choices based upon direct inter-relationship with the surrounding world. For a number of reasons, chiefly to do with a self-conscious valorisation of the body as a ground of spiritual development, and the over-arching significance of nature in the way that Pagan self-understanding is articulated, I suggest that such an embodied ethic is most likely to be easily found within contemporary Paganism.

Chapter 5 then articulates my reflections upon the range of methodologies that have informed my research. I have combined the use of both quantitative research (using data from an international, on-line questionnaire), and qualitative research (using data from participant observation and interviews with members of a local intentional community, and interviews with some well-known opinion formers in

the UK Pagan community). I justify this combination of methodologies through the mutual support given by triangulation: I locate the embodied ethic through my qualitative work, and then attempt to map this onto a broader population through the quantitative data. I explore the tension between phenomenological *epoché* and a more reflexive methodological approach rooted in respectful inter-relationship, and discuss the implications of embodiment and inter-relationship that inform the way I approach my subjects.

Chapter 6 examines some of the difficulties inherent in the assumption of an axiomatic relationship between contemporary Paganism and nature. I explore some of the different Pagan approaches to nature encountered from both emic and etic exponents, and examine some of the difficulties with prior attempts to rationalise this, critiquing the common position that suggests a dichotomy between two sub-groups of Pagans. I theorise an alternative solution — two simultaneous discourses of nature existing within Paganism — the esoteric, which privileges a symbolic understanding of nature, and the animist, which privileges a literal understanding. I argue that all forms of Paganism are best understood as being simultaneously informed by both these discourses, and posit a model of a sliding scale or continuum upon which individual Pagans and their traditions might be plotted.

Turning to the fieldwork data, Chapter 7 outlines the qualitative research that I undertook with the intentional permaculture community at Landmatters. I explore a number of key areas that emerged from my research: the strong emphasis upon relationship with the land, and the way in which they perceive their actions are validated by synchronicity. I explore the significance of ritual in deepening the web

of relationships at Landmatters, as well as the use of some quite explicit language of embodiment, before drawing the broad conclusion that, for many of the community, the immersive nature of their experience has led to a genuinely embodied ethic.

In Chapter 8 I begin the exploration of the quantitative research data from my on-line quantitative survey. In this initial analysis of the survey results, I outline the demographic data, and then consider the responses in relation to both attitudes and engagement in connection with issues of the environment, politics, globalisation, animal rights and genetic modification. Preliminary conclusions from this level of analysis suggest that, while respondents were certainly more likely to acknowledge attitudes demonstrating a good deal of concern for these issues, they were comparatively unlikely to get involved in activity or activism in support of these beliefs. In Chapters 9 and 10, I continue this analysis, comparing results from different groups of my respondents based upon their position on the animist/esoteric scale. These results demonstrate that those Pagans who are situated towards the animist end of the scale are consistently more likely to demonstrate more environmentally friendly attitudes (Chapter 9) and behaviours (Chapter 10) than those who are more influenced by the esoteric discourse of nature. Chapter 11 is the final conclusion, which reiterates both the argument and key elements of supporting evidence as well as suggesting some possible future challenges, both for academia and for Paganism, arising from the work.

Terminology

As in many areas of religious studies, there are considerable debates over terminology and capitalization in Pagan studies. I will capitalize the term Paganism (and Pagans) where I am referring to contemporary, self-identified Pagans and their actions and beliefs. I will not use the term 'Neo-Paganism', but this may occur (as may any number of variant capitalizations) in quotations from other sources. As I will explore in Chapter 6, the word Paganism is one that is forced to carry a great deal of baggage, and indeed may well be most accurately expressed in the plural, as Paganisms. While this may be the most technically accurate, I will use the singular term throughout as a great lake of ink has already been expended by many scholars on the most accurate way to describe or define it accurately, and I do not believe that adding another drop or two to such a pool will advance the specific focus of my thesis.

A similar issue arises in considering my treatment of the term 'nature'. In normal academic writing, one might expect to see nature (without the capital) as representing the actual physical world, and Nature (with the capital) as representing an idealization or hypostasis: nature presented as idea, symbol, or representation. Much of my thesis is dedicated to arguing that in fact this is a misleading and invidious distinction. (Indeed, this dichotomy neatly exemplifies the key ideas at the centre of my argument of two opposing discourses of nature informing Paganism). As the main thrust of my argument is centred on inter-relationship with nature *qua* nature, the thing itself rather than an ideal or symbolic understanding, I will follow Abrams' approach to capitalization:

I have generally chosen to keep the term in lower case, in order to remember that the earth is not just the round sphere in its entirety but also – first and foremost – the humble ground beneath our feet (Abram 2010, note).

This approach calls attention to an embodied and inter-relational approach to this description.

Summation

In this introduction I have explained some of my own motivations for pursuing this research, followed by a broad-brush description of the key theoretical ideas used in pursuit of the subject of enquiry. I have explored some of the ways in which this research makes a unique contribution, and have then given a brief outline of the specific chapters, and considered some significant issues of terminology.

2.

Embodiment

a chapter condemning Cartesianism has become as obligatory as a chapter praising it once was in treatises on 'modern' philosophy (Kohák 1992, 379)

The great difficulty in starting to write about the concept of embodied ethics, particularly in relation to the environment, is that, unlike other areas of discussion where the foundations may be chiselled from the living bedrock of solid academic debate, in this case the arguments may appear to rest upon less solid footings. This is not to say that I am actually trying to build upon sand, but it would certainly be true to suggest that these foundations are at least brick in that they are, in the very best post-modern manner, a *bricolage* composed of a variety of different ideas and disciplines which form a tight-knit and well-bonded foundation for the rest of the argument. Thus we will find such strange bed-fellows as environmental ethics, process philosophy, contemporary constructions of animism, and the philosophy of neuroscience making important contributions to under-pinning the argument. In this section I will seek to examine some of the key elements of the foundational thinking that underlies my thesis, and then explain how each one ties in to support the over-arching schema. This will broadly fall into two sections: this chapter will examine the concept of embodiment, and the next, the nature of environmental ethics.

The Modernist Paradigm of Ontological Dualism

The whole concept of embodiment is one of those slippery things: it very often seems to the layperson on first contact to be so entirely obvious that it doesn't

need any explanation or defence (*'of course I am an embodied being'*), although in fact it is much more complex. What I mean by embodiment is quite simply that being human is an experience that occurs in, and is mediated by, a physical body — the reason why we have the minds and the experiences that we do, are entirely due to us being embodied creatures — embodied in the particular kinds of bodies that we have. It is interesting though that this does have to be stated, explained, frequently quite sharply defended, and that it is not, in fact, as entirely self-evident as it may seem. I will begin by seeking to explain exactly why we need to defend or explain this concept — why it is often difficult to grasp.

Much of the difficulty arises from the way that we have been taught to think. The western philosophical tradition has a number of different ways of talking about the nature of self, and the way that this relates to the body. These are best enumerated as materialism (which says that any idea of consciousness or self derives solely from the physical being, and at the extreme end would label consciousness as an epiphenomenon, an unnecessary adjunct to the business of being human, which is purely the reproduction of genetic material), idealism (which says that only consciousness, or self, is real, but the physical world is illusory) and dualism (which accepts that both mind and body are real, but which privileges mind, and often situates consciousness as a transcendental reality outside the physical world). Of these three different ways of understanding the nature of self, dualism has historically been understood as dominant in western discourse, but ideas of embodiment are more firmly situated in the context of a materialist approach.

One of the greatest challenges with explaining the concept of embodiment is that this is most easily and commonly done through situating and articulating it in opposition to a perceived intellectual *status quo*. Vasquez points out however that such an approach is simplistic; “There is no monolithic and static Christianity, Platonism or Cartesianism that we can simplistically turn into the archenemy of embodiment” (Vasquez 2011, 21). A great many contributors to the western philosophical canon have sought to provide a more materialist understanding of the self and the world; to lay the philosophical groundwork, as it were, for more contemporary understandings of embodiment. While accepting this caveat, it is also true that both in terms of academia, and in common discourse, the ontologically dualist position is deeply rooted, and very frequently regarded as axiomatic. Thus one may have to add additional stress to a counter argument in order to provide a degree of balance. A good example of this profound complexity and tension between the two approaches may be seen in Vasquez’s own approach to Heidegger. While he suggests that Heidegger’s use of *Dasein* (being-there) provides “an embodied and emplaced notion of selfhood that overcomes the contradictions of Descartes’ dualistic, decontextualized and static concept of subjectivity” (Vasquez 2011, 69), he ultimately concedes that “Heidegger overplays the uniqueness of *Dasein* in relation to the material objects that surround it..., reinscribing a milder version of the classical mind-body, spirit-matter split” (Vasquez 2011, 76).

In the rest of this chapter where I attempt to explain the nature of embodiment, I do not wish to fall victim to Vasquez’s critique, and merely set up a straw man of

misrepresentative caricatured dualisms to demolish. I do, however, want to demonstrate the ways in which embodiment is a new, sometimes radical approach to thinking about the self, and how it challenges the ontological dualism which, while not composing the entirety of the western tradition, certainly reflects the vast majority thereof.

Most people in contemporary western societies share a fairly similar view of the whole concept of self, and would generally accept the following statement:

I am an entity composed of both a changing and mortal physical body, which either generates, or includes within it, a non-physical, permanent (or even immortal) self-conscious sense of continued existence, which most people would refer to as 'self'. That is to say that there is a sense of 'being me', which I have now, and which I take for granted continues back into the past from the start of my life (even beyond the point where I remember this sense of 'being me'), and will continue into the future.

There is little doubt that this way of understanding the self, as ontologically dualist (that is, with an axiomatic separation of 'mind' and 'body'), is very old. Plato certainly takes it for granted that humans have a 'soul' (a permanent lasting self), and suggests in *Phaedo*, that this is not merely different from, but also ontologically superior to, the body:

Then [at death] and not before, the soul is by itself apart from the body. While we live we shall be closest to knowledge if we refrain as much as possible from association with the body, and do not join with it more than

we must, if we are not infected with its nature, but purify ourselves from it until the god himself frees us (Grube 2002, 104).

Plato also, through separating the cosmos into the world of forms, and the world of mundane matter (most obviously in *The Republic*, where it is explained in the analogies of the sun, the divided line and the cave (Plato 1986, 306, 312, 317)) imparts to the roots of the western tradition of thought a fundamental understanding of an ontologically dualistic cosmos. This Greek philosophy has had an enormous influence upon the history of western thought through some of the great thinkers of the early Church, who, when articulating their new Christian theology, were influenced by the dominant intellectual paradigm of their day. St. Paul continued the ontological dualism through his division of human nature (notably in Galatians 5:13-26) into *σάρξ* (flesh, lower physical appetites) and *πνεῦμα* (breath/spirit, higher mental and spiritual desires). This tendency to integrate the ontological dualism of Greek thought into Christian theology was continued by St. Augustine whose 'City of God' teaches that human ends are divided between the metaphorical cities of God (i.e. a focus on spiritual development), and the 'City of man', where human appetites are concentrated upon worldly, physical concerns: "the two cities (the earthly and the heavenly, to wit), which, as we said, are in this present world commingled, and as it were entangled together". (Augustine 2003, 429). Kinsley also indicts other significant Christian thinkers, including Origen, Aquinas, Bonaventure, Luther, and Calvin as contributing to the acceptance of "such themes as anthropocentrism, the

domination of nature, and the superiority of humans [which] is typically understood to have a transcendent mandate” (Kinsley 1996, 115).

The most fundamental and influential statement of this dualist understanding of the nature of the self for the modern west was articulated by Descartes. Vasquez describes Descartes’ approach as authorizing “a crude form of materialism directed at nature and body..., failing to hold in check more highly developed philosophical idealisms dealing with the mind/soul” (Vasquez 2011, 40). Describing Descartes’ ideas as being within a materialist tradition is problematic, as he is frequently understood as the prime originator and articulator of the ontologically dualist perspective. Descartes argued that there was a distinction between *res cogitans* — mind or spirit, which is immaterial, transcendent, and valued — and *res extensa* — matter/body that occupies space, without inherent value. Thus for Descartes the human being is composed of both *res extensa*, that physical body which occupies space in the physical world, and both perceives, and is perceived through the senses, and *res cogitans*, the mind or spirit, which is that which is aware. On one level we might say that, for Descartes, only the mind is ‘really real’, as only the mind has any value, purpose, or meaning. The physical world of *res extensa* lacks any of these. It is important to remember that: “Throughout his life Descartes firmly believed that the mind, or soul, of man ... was essentially nonphysical” (Cottingham 1999, 236). Descartes consistently emphasises how this nonphysical essence is entirely and utterly separate and distinct from the body: “this ‘I’—that is, the soul by which I am what I am — is entirely distinct from the body, and indeed is easier to know than the body, and would not fail be whatever it is, even if the body did not

exist” (Descartes, cited in Cottingham, Stoothoff and Murdoch 1998, 36). At the same time, Descartes does not wish to suggest an entirely idealist approach, (i.e. one in which only mind is real, and the body and physical world do not really exist), and enlarges on this idea in order to explain the relationship between the body and mind:

I am not merely present in my body as a sailor is present in a ship, but that I am very closely joined and, as it were, intermingled with it, so that I and the body form a unit. If this were not so, I, who am nothing but a thinking thing would not feel pain when the body was hurt, but would perceive the damage purely by the intellect (Descartes, cited in Cottingham, Stoothoff and Murdoch 1998, 116).

Descartes’ later work suggested that the *res extensa* of the body, and the *res cogitans* of the mind interacted through the (for him, recently discovered) pineal gland. While it is true that Cartesian dualism is precisely that – dualist (as opposed to idealist), at the same time it is also true that it continues the emphases of Plato and St Paul, suggesting that the important, valued element, “the non-physical self”, is in fact of superior, if not ultimate value:

Although they may have put the certainty of their own existence before that of anything else, they failed to realize that they should have taken ‘themselves’ in this context to mean their minds alone (Descartes, cited in Cottingham, Stoothoff and Murdoch 1998, 163).

Damasio describes this approach as “Descartes’ error...the separation of the most refined operations of mind from the structure and operation of a biological organism” (Damasio 2006, 250). This influence of Descartes on western ways of thinking about both humans and nature is extremely significant, influencing even the tendency of science to concentrate upon *res extensa*; that is upon matter (perceived as being without inherent value or purpose, and insentient). Thus modern western thought sees the world as composed of insentient matter, a universal mechanism working according to set rules, where conscious awareness is a mere epiphenomenon, an ineffective and unnecessary by-product of the complexity of evolution.

Such a worldview is further delimited by the contemporary tendency to use language in such a way that it underpins and supports the awareness of a self. A great deal of the language that we commonly use to talk about ‘ourselves’ is metaphorical, yet in common usage we treat it as though it were literal. For example, when we talk about ‘my body’ as though it were a thing that belongs to me, we constantly reiterate the categorisation that says ‘I am not really my body’. That is, we are conditioned to think that ‘the thing that is most essential about me is different from, and somehow has ownership of, this body’. The force and power of such ways of speaking is demonstrated by Ingold’s comment that “The idea that objects have agency is at best a figure of speech, forced on us (Anglophones at least) by the structure of a language that requires every verb of action to have a nominal subject” (Ingold forthcoming), and, famously, by Wittgenstein; “One of the most misleading representational techniques in our language is the use of the word

'I', particularly when it is used in representing immediate experience, as in 'I can see a red patch'" (1964, paragraph 57) As the linguistic errors that are commonly used to discuss self are ones that are learned early, and constantly reinforced through social interactions, people rarely bother trying to think beyond them. Indeed, the majority are so influenced by them that they do not really see that there are other ways of thinking about 'self' than the ones that they are used to. Indeed the word 'embodiment' itself might be just as guilty of this misleading inexactitude as, in common usage, it implies that there is something external that is being placed within a body.

I have found a good example of the difficulty of thinking outside this dominant dualist paradigm in teaching Buddhism to GCSE students in a secondary school. Probably the hardest thing for them to understand is the concept of *anatta* (the Buddhist term for the concept of no-self). This is a fundamental part of the Buddhist dharma, which claims that there is no permanent, lasting self. Anything that makes people believe that there is an essential self lasting throughout their lives is illusory, and indeed this is the most fundamental attachment that Buddhists have to overcome on the path to enlightenment. (Indeed, one might suggest that this insight of human attachment to a false sense of self is a universal given. It is so counter-intuitive that, even within the Buddhist tradition from which it originates, it has to be taught; it is not apparent). It is articulated most clearly in the explanation given by the monk Nagasena in 'The questions of King Milinda' (Mendis 1993). Nagasena suggests that the King consider a chariot. If one takes a chariot apart, there is nothing that is essentially a chariot; there is a framework, axle, wheels etc.

but no inner or inherent *chariotness*, that is essential for there to be a chariot. Nagasena then uses this as an analogy for human beings. If you deconstruct the human being there are lots of components such as mind, body, awareness, feelings, thoughts etc. However, there is nothing that is essential: there is no essential self at the centre. What we think of as a self is, in fact, an agglomeration of these other components. This is further complicated by the fact that these other things, these *skandhas* (heaps) that compose this thing that we think of as a self, are all themselves permanently in flux, subject to the perpetual change that is the fundamental Buddhist understanding of the nature of existence (*anicca*). Thus a human is actually a constantly changing collection of constantly changing elements. For my students this has always been the hardest thing to understand. It seems to deny not only what they feel to be true about themselves, but also everything that their preceding education and social conditioning have taught them to be true: that they are the same person that they were a year ago, and will continue to be the same person until they die (and in some cases beyond that). It is important, however, because it raises the spectre of a valid alternative to the dominant dualistic worldview of the west. The western worldview is one that is accepted, not because it is 'right' in the sense that it is the only way to look at things, but actually, only because it is the one that people are most used to, the one that the majority are brought up with, and the one that common usage of language supports.

Embodiment and the world

It is not difficult to find thinkers whose work directly picks up the gauntlet thrown down by Descartes (and have consequently been so frequently ignored for so long).

A significant starting point for my understanding is Merleau-Ponty, who develops the idea of embodiment in opposition to the Cartesian *res cogitans* (the idea of the subjective self knowing in glorious isolation). He argues that “to be a body is to be tied to a certain world... [as] our body is not primarily in space, it is of it” (Merleau-Ponty 2003, 148). There is no body ‘in itself’, which could be objectified and given universal status. Instead of the Cartesian understanding of the body as an object, a thing (*res extensa*), which is appreciated, understood and perceived by the perceiving mind (*res cogitans*), Merleau-Ponty argues that the body is, in fact, the subject — that perception, by its very nature, is embodied. We cannot know anything except through the body: we see through the eyes, feel with the skin etc. Descartes’ idea of perception ‘in itself’ is impossible, perception must always be embodied. This statement is doubly important, for Merleau-Ponty does not understand such perception as being merely the impact of the physical world on the body. Instead he sees the body as being neither distinct nor separated from the world that it inhabits. For Merleau-Ponty, it is the interaction of the body and the world that lies at the basis of perception. As the subject perceives it is constantly changing. There is no subject in general, no autonomous thinker; consciousness is perceptual, formed and shaped by embodiment.

The thing is inseparable from a person perceiving it, and can never be actually in itself because its articulations are those of our very existence, and because it stands at the other end of our gaze or at the terminus of a sensory exploration which invests it with humanity (Merleau-Ponty 2003, 373).

Such a perspective seems extremely at odds with more normative understandings of the self — and in its flexibility and nebulosity, rather more like the Buddha's teachings of *anicca* and *anatta* examined earlier. Unlike Descartes' comparatively straightforward world view, where the subjective mind appreciates the objective external universe (of which the body is a part), these discrete differences break down for Merleau-Ponty. The body becomes subjective and perceives through its interaction, its relationship with the world, a relationship that is subject to constant flow and change. Perception becomes an act of communication, of erotic joining with the world surrounding us:

Every perception is a communication or a communion, the taking up or completion by us of some extraneous intention or, on the other hand, the complete expression outside ourselves of our perception powers, and a coition, so to speak, of our bodies with things (Merleau-Ponty 2003, 373).

The use of the term "coition" in this translation doubly emphasises the erotic power of Merleau-Ponty's argument; it is suggesting that perception arises from the analogous lovemaking between our bodies and the world. Abram emphasises how Merleau-Ponty's understanding of this inter-relationship is "consistently described in the active voice: the sensible 'beckons to me', 'sets a problem for my body to solve'... and even 'thinks itself within me'" (Abram 1996, 55), before neatly summing up his approach to experience as:

reciprocal encounter — of tension, communication and commingling. From within the depths of this encounter, we know the thing or phenomenon

only as our interlocutor — as a dynamic presence that confronts us and draws us into relation (Abram 1996, 56).

Merleau-Ponty describes this inter-relationship between subject and object at great length: we do not passively observe with the senses, but our senses enable us to inter-relate with the object of experience:

The thing as presented to sight... and which stays the same for us through a series of experiences is neither a *quale* genuinely subsisting, or the notion of conscious of such an objective property, but what is discovered or taken up by our gaze or our movement, a question to which these things provide a fully appropriate reply (Merleau-Ponty 2003, 370).

He describes the qualities that we may attribute to things as a 'symbiosis'. They are neither inherently within us, nor in the thing that we encounter, but are 'suspended' from the encounter. Ultimately, Merleau-Ponty describes experience as "my full co-existence with the phenomenon" (Merleau-Ponty 2003, 370). This concept of reciprocal relationship will come to be extremely important for the development of this thesis, holding, as it does, the key to understanding the significance of embodiment for ethics, and driving the integration of an embodied ethic into the lives of some of my research subjects.

Embodiment and Process

Merleau-Ponty's vision of experience and existence as being rooted in flowing, reciprocal relationships segues neatly into another important aspect at the foundations of my argument, that of panpsychism, which situates consciousness

throughout the universe, as present in all things. Velmans expresses this point of view neatly, arguing that this is the most elegant explanation of the 'problem of mind':

However, consciousness, in some primal form, did not emerge at any particular stage of evolution. Rather, it was there from the beginning. Its emergence, with the birth of the universe, is neither more nor less mysterious than the emergence of matter, energy, space and time (Velmans 2007, 280).

This panpsychic stance is given a particularly nuanced form by de Quincey's *Radical Naturalism* (De Quincey 2002). This suggests that consciousness is not merely a property of 'higher beings', but is in fact, a property of all that exists, based in turn upon the Process Philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead. De Quincey's arguments are particularly significant in that they provide a philosophical framework for beginning to understand the idea of the 'embodied self', as well as helping to address some of the more challenging implications of 'perception as relationship', and also providing the kind of meta-narrative that could be used to construct a genuinely embodied ethic.

In a similar way to Merleau-Ponty, Whitehead's fundamental understanding of the universe is one based upon process. This means that the universe is not composed of things (the Cartesian *res extensa*; 'concrete lumps of stuff'), nor of minds (*res cogitans*), but of processes. Whitehead describes these processes as *actual entities*, which are each in fact experiencing subjects. Each actual entity is not a *thing* (in the

Cartesian sense) in itself, but a process of becoming, of action. The nature of process is inherently, and necessarily, sentient in that all actual entities are occasions of experience. This experiential nature of reality is based upon prehension, that is, the interior subjectivity of each actual entity. Such axiomata also return to us the whole business of reciprocity — there is a fundamental inter-relation between all things. All actual entities are so closely inter-related, and bound up with one another that it is fallacious to consider any particular entity as isolated or self-contained — an approach that is consistent with that of Merleau-Ponty. Whitehead's insistence upon the interdependence of actual entities means that nothing is self-sufficient in the Cartesian sense; everything is composed of and influenced by everything else, and needs to be understood as processes rather than things. Thus the fundamental nature of things is neither 'mind' nor 'matter', but process.

Every object is the result of a process whereby aspects of the universe concreate (converge) to become that object. If we consider an example of classic *res extensa*, such as a lump of rock, we may see how this may actually be said to work. The lump of rock is composed of a variety of things; mica, quartz, shale; which are in turn composed of particles down to, and beyond, the atomic level. In simple terms, these particles are temporarily making up the processes that are the rock. They have existed elsewhere before making up the rock, and will continue to exist elsewhere after the rock has eroded and ceased to exist. The rock itself is not an actual entity *per se*, but it is a community of actual entities: its component particles are some constituent parts of the universe which have concreated to produce an

object that appears to be 'a rock'. Thus the rock is itself a process — the only thing that is certain about it is change. Whitehead argues that the rock is able to remain being a rock, as long as the actual entities that compose the rockprehend, that is, have some sort of subjective awareness of, their existence in the previous moment, and contribute towards their existence in the next moment. Concrecence is not a passive thing. The actual entity selects from the infinite stream of possibilities that stream in from the universe, which is why any one particular object is different from another. This is achieved through *prehension*: a subjective, interior element of the actual entities. De Quincey illustrates this through the useful analogy of the tornado:

A helpful way to picture this is the way a tornado forms. It is nothing more than a concrecence of meteorological events, swirling cones of wind. Yet we even give it a name. The tornado looks like a thing—we can point to it, measure it, and see its devastating effects— but in essence it is just rapid, patterned movements of air. It emerges from the flux of weather events, has its own particular form, moves across the landscape, and eventually releases its energy and dissolves back into the flux from which it arose (De Quincey 2002, 162).

The idea of prehension means that there is some degree of subjectivity within all actual entities, but this is not to be confused with saying that all actual entities are conscious. Consciousness is something that Whitehead attributes only to higher organisms, communities of actual entities which have achieved such considerable complexity and integration that their mental poles are more pronounced. At the

same time, this is not to deny that there is a subjective interiority to those things that are not conscious: This argument is supported by Christ who states that Whitehead's use of the term 'prehension', rather than 'feeling,' was an attempt to escape from the accusation that he was according human-like consciousness to all things. She uses Hartshorne's understanding of panpsychism to demonstrate that there is "no part of nature in which 'feeling or sentience' could be said to be totally absent... yet this must be understood in a 'radically broad and non-anthropomorphic sense" (Christ 2003, 55). De Quincey explains it succinctly:

just as a dog or chimpanzee can have experiences that differ from human consciousness, so too, lizards, worms, bacteria, molecules, atoms and electrons may each have their own characteristic forms of experience — primitive feelings that respond to their particular environmental stimuli (De Quincey 2002, 195).

De Quincey's primary concern is to argue that consciousness exists, as Harvey puts it, "all the way down" (Harvey 2005, 212); that interiority or subjectivity is an inherent property of matter. This approach deals succinctly with the mind-body problem inherent in Cartesian dualism, by eliminating the jump between non-experiencing matter and experiencing organisms, because it suggests that the latter are composed of actual entities which do have experience, i.e. by doing away with non-experiencing matter. Thus, from a process perspective "Experience or mind is the same ontological type as body or matter" (De Quincey 2002, 223). This view is one derived from process philosophy, and is shared by Christ, who states that:

For process philosophy, the ability to feel and to feel the feelings of others to some degree, or to relate with others in some sense with creative freedom, with sympathy, with love, and with enjoyment is to be attributed to all individuals in the cosmos... Unitary or singular individuals are those who can feel. These include human beings, animals, cells, atoms, and particles of atoms (Christ 2003, 57).

De Quincey's radical naturalism thus places us in a radically different universe from the one in which we began. There are two overwhelmingly important conclusions, which he has helped us reach. Firstly, the mind-body split is false. Mind is derived from, and inter-related with the body, thus consciousness is radically embodied. Secondly, that the view of the universe as composed of inert, objective, insentient matter is false. The universe is an ongoing hierarchy of processes which are above all sentient and subjective; matter and energy are subjects of experience. Both De Quincey and Merleau-Ponty thus provide an alternative paradigm to that of modernist ontological dualism.

2nd Generation Embodiment

This concept of embodiment is also firmly supported by work in cognitive science. Lakoff and Johnson identify what they describe as the 'second generation' of cognitive science, focussing upon the whole idea of the embodiment of mind. This arose in response to experimental evidence which suggested that concepts and reasoning in the human mind are dependent upon embodiment. They assert that this understanding places the concept of embodiment at the centre of any attempt

to understand the structure and content of human thought. Indeed, they build upon de Quincey's panpsychism, and suggest that humans establish meaning through the way that they function in the world, and make sense of it through bodily and imaginative structures. Lakoff criticises the Cartesian view thus:

What the human body does not do, on the objectivist account, is add anything essential to concepts that does not correspond to what is objectively present in the structure of the world. The body does not play an essential role in giving concepts meaning. And the body plays no role in characterizing the nature of reason (Lakoff 1987, 174).

They go on to describe the key ideas of the 'second generation view of embodiment', which begin by stating that sensorimotor experience (i.e. experience derived from being within a body which reacts with the surrounding universe through the senses and the body's movement, or more simply, being human) is the origin of all conceptual structures:

Human conceptual categories have properties that are, at least in part, determined by the bodily nature of the people doing the categorizing, rather than solely by the properties of the category members (Lakoff 1987, 371).

Questions about the meaning of such mental structures, so common within Cartesian philosophy (i.e. 'what is the self?') are no longer relevant, as they are given intrinsic meaning through their connection, both to our bodies, and to our embodied experience. They cannot be discussed symbolically (i.e. it makes no sense

to talk about a 'disembodied self' when the fact of embodiment is the origin of the self). Such an approach is solidly in line with Damasio's argument that:

the comprehensive understanding of the human mind requires an organismic perspective; that not only must the mind move from a nonphysical continuum to the realm of biological tissue, but it must also be related to a whole organism possessed of integrated body proper and brain, and fully interactive with a physical and social environment (Damasio 2006, 252).

Lakoff and Johnson have written extensively about the idea of the primary metaphor. The key idea is that we think about abstract concepts using ways of thinking that are directly related to embodiment, we describe thought and thinking using ideas that we understand due to the operation of our sensorimotor apparatus. This is to be distinguished from the traditional philosophical view of metaphorical thinking which says that when we use a metaphor we are merely explaining a concept by suggesting something that it is like. The primary metaphor, on the other hand, is saying that we understand and use an abstract concept only because we initially encounter and understand it through being in a body. We may elucidate this by considering the primary metaphor of "understanding is grasping" (Lakoff and Johnson 2002, 125), which may be used in a variety of ways, but is commonly used in such ways as: 'I get what you mean', 'I've never been able to hang onto mathematical ideas', or: 'I've grasped that idea'. In this case, what is being talked about is comprehension (itself derived from the Latin meaning 'to hold tightly'). We use the idea of 'grasping' because our original understanding of this

arises from the embodied experience of touching and manipulating an object in order to gain information about it (something that humans begin to do at a very young age). Thus our abstract conceptualising arises from the primary embodied experience. This example gives us a clear explanation of their assertion that human reason must be embodied because our fundamental forms of inference arise from sensorimotor and embodied experience, and that reason must be imaginative in that it uses metaphor to map these bodily inferences onto abstract modes of inference. This idea of the inherent interdependence of the body and cognition is shared by Varela who states:

...cognition depends upon the kinds of experience that come from having a body with various sensorimotor capacities...we mean to emphasize once again that sensory and motor processes, perception and action are fundamentally inseparable in lived cognition (Varela 1993, 173).

Embodiment & Animism.

Recent academic work on animism provides yet another way to approach these concepts of embodied consciousness, and profound inter-relation. Animism is a difficult and frequently contested concept, but Harvey sums up what he identifies as 'the new animism' by stating: "Animists are people who recognise that the world is full of persons, only some of whom are human, and that life is always lived in relationship with others" (Harvey 2005, xi). The term 'new animism', differentiates it from older, ethnographic ideas which tended to assume a derogatory, colonial, voice.

Ingold is inspired by the ways those who practise some traditional lifeways may observe a totally different understanding of the nature of being, which may bring provide a schema that integrates all the different elements of thought that I have considered above. He emphasises that animism is best understood “not as a way of believing *about* the world, but with a condition of being *in* it” (Ingold March 2006, 10). He explains that:

Animacy... is the dynamic, transformative potential of the entire field of relations within which beings of all kinds, more or less person-like or thing-like, continually and reciprocally bring one another into existence (Ingold 2006, 10).

This perception of reciprocal interaction and co-creation as the key way to understand being is entirely resonant with Merleau-Ponty’s view of the way in which experience is something that emerges from the inter-relation between the subject and the surrounding world. This articulation of materialist philosophical discourse with the voice of embodied indigenous practice is found elsewhere, for instance in Ingold’s assertions that, for the Koyukon of Alaska, “the names of animals are not nouns, but verbs” (Ingold 2006, 14) and that the ontology of animism “assigns primacy to processes of formation as against their final products, and to flows and transformations of materials as against states of matter” (Ingold forthcoming). This demonstrates the profound way in which Whitehead’s most elaborate philosophical constructions can be profoundly and simply articulated through the intuited and experienced realities of indigenous lifeways.

All these different thinkers, from such a widely diverse set of academic backgrounds, fundamentally agree about two vitally important points. Firstly, consciousness is embodied — the ontologically dualist description is erroneous and does not accurately describe reality. The reality of our own experience, those of neuroscience, of Buddhist psychology, and of process philosophy are realities where consciousness is perceived as profoundly embodied. The second key point that arises from this is that the fundamental nature of reality is relational; our embodied selves inter-relate with the reality that surrounds us. We do not observe it from the position of some glorious objective detachment, but are embedded within it; we affect it, and are affected by it, and thus relationship lies at the very heart of the nature of being. Ingold expresses the primacy of this inter-relation by explaining that “wherever there are surfaces life depends on the continual exchange of materials across them” (Ingold forthcoming).

Embodied Ethics?

To sum up this brief survey of some significant ideas, what we are looking at is a shift of focus from the Cartesian dualism that is woven so profoundly into the ‘operating system’ of modern western culture to something closer to Vasquez’s description of a “flexible, non-reductive materialist framework” (Vasquez 2011, 4), explaining that it is “non-reductive because it highlights complexity, inter-level connectivity, emergence, situated knowledge and relative indeterminacy and openness against monocausal, unidirectional and totalizing explanatory schemes” (Vasquez 2011, 5).

While there are some aspects of embodiment that seem to be issues only of common sense ('I am my body'), others are much more challenging to the modernist perspective, and raise a host of different issues. The key foundational points that I wish to make from this particular approach are, firstly, that human beings are profoundly embodied. Not only do we inter-relate with the world around us through our bodies (and this is not merely a question of being a subjective observer of an objective other, but a profound inter-relation), but beyond even this, the way in which we understand ourselves and the functions of our own mind and thought arise from the experience of embodiment. According to Johnson:

No matter how sophisticated our abstractions become, if they are to be meaningful to us, they must retain their intimate ties to our embodied modes of conceptualization and reasoning (Johnson 1999, 81).

The second key point, arising from the first, is the necessity for a more fluid or nebulous understanding of the nature of self/selves as things that fluctuate and are impermanent, arising from a whole series of different inter-relationships so closely bound into the world around them, that at times the boundaries are unclear. Using process philosophy to understand the world allows one to step into that apparently chaotic state where the exact difference between 'in here' and 'out there' is unclear. Such an intimate relationship is also implied in Zohar's use of the wave/particle duality of quantum physics to approach the self/other:

seen in its 'particle aspect' the quantum self has an important individual integrity. Yet, through its 'wave aspect' it is able to be involved

simultaneously with other selves and with the culture at large (Zohar 1990, 139).

The third and final point, which will be considered at much greater length in the next chapter, is the implication for the way that we treat the Other. This becomes both vital and intensely personal, for if we appreciate how deeply we are embedded within this web of being, then our level of concern for those others to whom we relate so closely must be high. The urgency of this approach is spurred on by the realisations of process philosophy – if those ‘other things’ do in fact possess a subjective interiority to all things, then the way that we treat those other things, our ethics, must be of prime importance.

These lie at the root of my search for an embodied ethic. Throughout history the practice of ethics (where they have not been imposed by external religious or political power), has been both intellectual and elitist — ethics are understood to arise from internal, intellectual speculation and this understanding is itself frequently valorised. Both ontological ethical approaches, such as utilitarianism, and deontological ones, such as the categorical imperative, actually require intellectual speculation and rely upon the exercise of ‘pure reason’. Such a construction is profoundly situated within the modernist, ontologically dualistic paradigm. These constructions of ethics are also frequently tied in with ‘power-over’ — they are imposed from without rather than accepted from within (consider the difference between the biblical decalogue — *If you don’t do these ten bad things, then God won’t punish you*, and the Buddhist Ten Precepts — *I undertake to do my best to try to do these ten good things*). I reject this approach, and suggest

that we are now free to look in some rather surprising places for our sources of ethics: no longer the exercise of the *res cogitans*, but instead something arising from the body, and from its embedded participation in a living world. Gallagher implies something similar in his discussion of human free will:

I think we are even larger than he [Dennett] thinks — we are not just what happens in our brains. The “Loop” extends through and is limited by our bodily capabilities, into the surrounding environment, which is social as well as physical, and feeds back through our conscious experience into the decisions we make (Gallagher 2005, 242).

The idea that our behaviours and the choices we make emerge from our embedded-ness within a particular lived reality, rather than from detached, rational objectification is not a new one. Bourdieu uses the term *habitus* to describe the ways in which traditional societies transmit their ethics, and asserts that this is not merely an inherited set of behaviours, but something that is able to adapt to changes in the shared experience of embodied reality:

The objective homogenizing of group or class habitus which results from the homogeneity of the conditions of existence is what enables practices to be objectively harmonized without any intentional calculation or conscious reference to a norm and mutually adjusted *in the absence of any direct interaction, or, a fortiori*, explicit coordination (Bourdieu 1991, 80).

This philosophical approach is echoed once again in Ingold’s ‘animacy’, although here he refers to it as being ‘pre-ethical’:

Intuitive understanding... rests in perceptual skills that emerge, for each and every being, through a process of development in a historically specific environment... The sentient ecology is thus both pre-objective and pre-ethical (Ingold 2000, 25).

This 'sentient ecology' emerges from the direct encounter between the self and the surrounding world, and is 'pre-ethical' because it is pre-reflective. It is not a carefully considered approach to ethical action, not a weighed up and deliberated Kantian rule or a careful utilitarian calculation, but a specific action arising from the moment – and a specific moment, in a specific set of circumstances. This is not to say, however, that such an embodied approach cannot be cultivated, and indeed the dramatic ontological separations that are the hallmark of modernism, cutting off 'I' from 'Other', 'in here' from 'out there', and 'rational mind' from 'insentient flesh', mean that effort is required to achieve it. The profound awareness of the surrounding world that underlies Ingold's sentient ecology is one that can only arise through prolonged careful attention, and lived experience. Varela uses the term *wu-wei* (which he describes as "sometimes, but inadequately rendered as "not-doing"") to explore the ways in which ethical behaviour arises spontaneously from (both acquired and cultivated) embodied experience:

My point is that *wu-wei* points to a journey of *experience* and *learning*, not to a mere intellectual puzzle that one solves. It points to the process of acquiring a disposition where immediacy precedes deliberation, where nondual action precedes the radical distinction between subject and object (Varela 1999, 33).

Varela's work combines both neuroscience and mindfulness practice to suggest ways in which this nondual action (i.e. action taken on the part of the other before the articulation of their otherness) can be developed.

It is clear that in this context we are talking about an ethical practice that is radically embodied, in fact situated not merely with the body, but reliant upon, and emerging through the inter-relationship of the body and the surrounding world. Holler's suggestion for a general outline of such an embodied ethic is a good example of how things might be different — an ethical approach that does not valorise pure reason, but the senses, and faces outward to the multiplicity of interiorities with which we interrelate in a compassionate and mindful way:

Such a moral theory would respect what we share with animals; the environment, the ability to feel pain and pleasure, and the engagement in social relations. The senses would be recognized, and providing an important foundation for moral authority, and discussions of moral agency would emphasize compassion for sentient beings and awareness of our actions upon them. To paraphrase Zen master Dogon, it is not we who affirm the myriad of things, but the myriad of things that affirm us (Holler 2002, 11).

3.

Environmental Ethics

One impulse from a vernal wood

May teach you more of man,

Of moral evil and of good,

Than all the sages can.

(Wordsworth 2008, 130)

In the previous chapter I considered ways in which a number of different thinkers challenge the hegemony of ontological dualism that is such a key element of the modernist worldview. The primary theme that ties all those various approaches together is that of relationship. Moving beyond the ontological dichotomy is not, however, something that is only done in one place – in relation to mind/body: but once that Rubicon has been crossed, all other dichotomies — self/other, inside/outside, human/nature, rational/emotional — are problematized and challenged as well. This centrality of relationship has profound implications for our approach to ethics, as ethics are, most fundamentally, the ways in which we organise, describe, or practise our relationships with the Other. I argue that as inter-relationship is indeed at the core of being, a being that is framed by the fact of our embodiment, our ethics should also reflect embodiment; they should arise from these perceptions, from the lives we live, and our relationships to the world around us.

Many of the key ideas from the traditional western philosophical view that I examined in the context of the human self are also extremely influential when we come to look at the way that humans treat what has been traditionally understood as the 'objective' world around them, particularly in their relationships with other humans, other forms of life, biospheres, and the environment in general. Indeed, the Cartesian view is one that has been enormously influential in this respect, privileging humans above all other things, as alone having subjectivity, that essential interiority which makes humans different to all other forms of life and, more significantly, makes them superior.

A number of different facets have combined to underlie the modernist, western approach to the natural world. The idea of the inherent superiority of humans is found in Greek philosophy, where it is clearly implied in the description of humans as 'rational animals'. The 'animal nature' of humans was seen as needing the restraint and order of reason to rule them, and such rationality was seen as the key to understanding human superiority over other animals. The dominion theology of western Christianity (long held and only recently, and sporadically repudiated) states clearly that humanity is separated from and superior to, the rest of nature. This critique of Christianity is summed up by Hooker's statement that:

The Judaeo-Christian tradition has most often been blamed for promoting a careless and rapacious attitude to the environment. 'Go forth and multiply and subdue the earth and have dominion over it'. Here we have a projection of empire mentality on to our relation with nature ('dominion'), humans ('Man') as conqueror of nature ('subdue'), hence nature as useful

possession, to be overwhelmed and displaced ('multiply'). Humans here are separate from nature and superior to it. In this tradition we have responsibility neither to nature nor for nature. We are responsible to God, for ourselves (Hooker 1992, 151).

This analysis was first articulated by White, who famously critiqued Christianity as "the most anthropocentric religion" (White 1967, 1205), describing how the biblical account of creation asserts that "God planned all of this [the universe] explicitly for man's benefit and rule: no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man's purposes. And, although man's body is made of clay, he is not simply part of nature: he is made in God's image" (White 1967, 1205). As we saw in the last chapter, this discourse has had a strong influence on embedding the mind/body dichotomy within western thought, but it also goes on to underpin an over-arching discourse of the dominance and subjugation by humankind, of a natural world that is entirely value-free, providing a "background for the moral education of humans... without intrinsic spiritual nature or goal, and are created entirely for human purposes" (Kinsley 1996, 109). White also goes on to draw out other implications that this western Christian approach has had for the treatment of nature:

In Antiquity, every tree, every spring, every stream, every hill had its own *genius loci*, its guardian spirit. These spirits were accessible to men, but were very unlike men; centaurs, fauns, and mermaids show their ambivalence. Before one cut a tree, mined a mountain, or dammed a brook, it was important to placate the spirit in charge of

that particular situation, and to keep it placated. By destroying pagan animism, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects (White 1967, 1205).

This radical change in perspective, away from the honouring relationship with the local natural world, as we shall see, is one that a great many Pagans and some other thinkers are attempting to reverse. Of course it would be unfair to suggest that this attitude is still maintained by all Christian theologians, who now more frequently articulate a discourse of stewardship to emphasise that mankind has a duty of care to the rest of the environment, and who stress other biblical material which they see as commanding an ethical treatment of animals. Nash surveys a large number of ecotheologians who emphasised the concept of stewardship, starting with Benedict in the sixth century – although he does concede that “Stewardship was notable chiefly by its absence in the thousand years of Christian thought following St Benedict” (Nash 1996, 202). There is though, even within this world-view an underlying dichotomy between mankind and other forms of life, with the superiority of mankind clearly expressed. Hooker points out that:

According to the ‘man-as-steward’ tradition we have responsibility to God for nature in its own right, as well as for ourselves. The ultimate basis for our bearing this responsibility may either be taken as God’s command, or because of the intrinsic value nature has been given as a glorifier of God. In either case this position is at the For = Nature, To = Transcendent, Why? = Transcendent location (Hooker 1992, 151).

There is also the issue that the physical world is valued only inasmuch as it is a divine creation, not in and of itself. The objectification of the universe implied by Descartes, and brought to fruition in the work of Newton, mechanising and systematising the world in such a way as to alienate and isolate humankind as the pinnacle of creation, has concretised this world-view as the default setting of popular western culture.

However, the rise of a more environmental consciousness since the 1960s has seen an acknowledgement of the negative aspects of this world-view in the spreading awareness, not only of the damage to the biosphere that it has created, but of the potential risk to continued human life. This has been recognized by a new branch of philosophical ethics, namely environmental ethics. This philosophy attempts to deal with questions about the kind of value that should be attributed to the natural environment, to the things other than human beings, with whom we share the world. Should they be valued inasmuch as they are useful to us, or inasmuch as we attribute a value to them, or do they in fact have a value that both transcends, and is independent of, human interests? If this is, in fact, the case, then a new and radical moral outlook is called for, which recognises and respects these values, independent of the value of such things for human beings. Such a moral outlook is summed up by Kohák who states; "Philosophical ecologists share a lived experience of being human and of nature... with a community of respectful discourse" (Kohák 1992, 376).

Kohák's assertion here is one that is not without its critics. Machnaghten and Urry critique all approaches to ethics that are constructed in, or in relation to, nature, as

being fundamentally unsound. They argue that the concept of nature is not a 'thing out there', but a socio-cultural construct:

if nature is no longer viewable as simply 'natural' but is socially and culturally constructed, then nature does not and cannot provide, as has often been argued, the simple and unmediated ethical or moral foundation for the good life (Macnaghten and Urry 1998, 30).

They argue that there is no such thing as nature; that there are in fact many 'natures' many different ways of looking at the external world, all of which are discourses of equal power and authority. They decry 'environmental idealism', which they suggest mistakes these constructs for reality. Smith takes issue with this approach, and suggests that it is, in fact, a continuation of the western, anthropocentric approach that places value as existing entirely with the rational discourse of humans:

this sociocultural colonization of the natural world typifies that anthropocentric hubris that allows blinkered humanists to regard their theoretical problematic as complete without regard for nature's own being (verb) (Smith 2001, 117).

A philosophical continuum

The traditional understanding of the Other as the *object* of our ethics is problematized by much of the work that I looked at in the last chapter. Indeed, it would be true to say that the one of the ways that ethics have been coerced to overlook the mistreatment of individuals is by objectification. When we refuse to

see the Other as similar to ourselves, a subject that experiences both pleasure and pain, then we treat it as an object. From the example of Odysseus' massacre of the maids (given by Leopold (2001, 201)) to the horror of the Holocaust, it is this refusal to recognise subject-hood that has allowed ethical behaviour to be subverted. If this is the case for other humans, how much more has it been the case for other forms of life? The continuum of philosophy that I examine in this chapter is one that finds different ways of dealing with the boundary of subjectivity. Subjects are honoured in these ethics, but the nature of subject-hood grows and changes in these different ethical frameworks, so that eventually, following the intellectual insights of process philosophy, and honouring the lived experience of indigenous animacy, the category of subject, of that which is due appropriate ethical honouring, extends to all nature.

Those philosophers who have attempted to tackle the issues that arise from ascribing inherent value to the natural world may be considered in a continuum of widening ethical consideration, and I will consider several points along this continuum; from Schweitzer's reverence for life, through biocentric ethics (Rolston, Nagel, Taylor), ecocentric ethics (Leopold), and deep ecology (Naess) to a much more directly engaged and embodied form of relation informed by Plumwood's eco-feminism and the work of Levinas and Buber. These may all be understood as points on a philosophical continuum of development towards acknowledging the importance of the reciprocal relationship that I explored in the last chapter as significant for ethics.

Reverence for Life.

Albert Schweitzer's view of the way that the world should be approached was founded in his idea of 'reverence for life' (1923), which is a position that states that all life is sacred, and that humans should live accordingly, treating each living being as an inherently valuable 'will to live'. This is identified by Palmer as an "individualist deontological position" (Palmer 1998, 85), for it stresses the inherent, rather than consequential value of each individual living thing. For Schweitzer, this 'will to live' is not explicitly identified as any form of interiority within living things, but almost as a philosophical conceit that enables him to attach value to objective living things, and thus approach them in an ethical manner: "Ethics is in fact reverence for the will-to-live both within and without my own personality" (Schweitzer 1923, 97). The inherent value lies in the recognition of a similar 'will to live' to our own in other living things. Indeed, Schweitzer sees this will as a unified force, fragmented in nature into individual lives: "I am the life that wills to live, in the midst of life that wills to live" (Schweitzer 1987, 309). Schweitzer's position is certainly one that emphasises equality, as all wills-to-live are equal, and any judgement of their relative value would lie in their relative distance from humanity, and thus be subjective. While this equality may be explicitly stated, there is an inconsistency within Schweitzer's work, as he draws a distinction between the will-to-live of humans, which is self-conscious, and that of all other beings, which is not, thus maintaining a continuation of the underlying western dichotomy between subjective humans and objective others. Schweitzer's ultimate return to the primacy of human consciousness is echoed by other philosophers, such as Norton,

who holds that any value placed on living things must be placed there by a human valuer: “valuing always occurs from the viewpoint of a conscious valuer... Only the humans are valuing agents” (Norton 1991, 251). Such an argument is also put forward by Baird Callicott, who says that nature contains: “a range of potential values in nature actualisable upon interaction with consciousness” (Baird Callicott 1992, 129). For Baird Callicott, human consciousness is the only source of value in the cosmos; without its observation and giving of values there are only impassive phenomena which are inherently valueless. The range of possible ‘valuers’ in this context is extended by Singer (1976) to include ‘higher’ animals as conscious sources of value (inasmuch as they have preferences that can be satisfied or frustrated). These thinkers, while they may appear to be providing a more inclusive approach to the non-human others, are still firmly rooted within the western modernist approach which emphasises the distinction between the subjectivity of humans, and the objectivity of other forms of life, and indeed, of nature in general. Such an approach is critiqued by biocentric ethics, which begins to recognise the subjectivity of the Other by proposing that living organisms possess an inherent value.

Biocentric Ethics

In outlining a biocentric ethic, Rolston critiques the ultimately anthropocentric view that suggests:

Nature simply *is*, without objective value; the preferences of human subjects establish value; and these human values, appropriately considered,

generate what *ought* to be. Nature is amoral; only humans are ethical subjects and objects of duty (Rolston 1992, 135).

He then goes on to argue that biological statements about what is good for organisms are factual statements about values in the natural world. Thus instrumental goods for insentient organisms are clear examples of non-psychological objective values in nature. He proposes that the genetic creativity that causes speciation, which allows species to fit within specific areas of a bio system and which continues their development in fact suggests that objective value exists within living organisms:

... there is value wherever there is positive creativity. While such creativity can be present in subjects with their interests and preferences, it can also be present objectively in living organisms with their lives defended, and in species that defend an identity over time, and in systems that are self-organizing and that project storied achievements (Rolston 2001, 85).

This idea of an inherent value within individual organisms is also found in Taylor, who argues that to take a view whereby a particular form of life is considered as a teleological centre of life is not a false anthropomorphisation. He concludes that through close observation of an individual living thing it is possible to come to an understanding of its point of view: "Conceiving of it as a centre of life, one is able to look at the world from its perspective" (Taylor 2001, 107). Such a point of view is similar to that argued by Nagel, who accords consciousness and thus, by implication, ethical value to any being where: "there is something that it is like

to be that organism" (Nagel 1974, 436) . This is not dependent upon the presence of consciousness within the living thing, but upon the fact that each is a teleological centre of life in the sense that it is a self-preserving system. Taylor goes on to state that each teleological centre of life may be considered as an ethical entity, that its individual ethical perspective may be considered in such a way that actions towards it may be considered as beneficial or malefic, or indifferent. Those which are beneficial are those which increase its likelihood of self-preservation, those which are malefic those which limit or deny it. Taylor argues that such a recognition of the ethical significance of each teleological centre of life means that human decisions about actions have to reflect an awareness of that being's perspective. This recognition of non-human living things as having a *telos*; a purpose or goal, is a substantial shift towards honouring the subjectivity of living things, and according proper respect and acknowledgment to that awareness.

Ecocentric Ethics

Beyond this biocentric perspective which ascribes value to living things are ecocentric ethics, which ascribe an inherent value to the earth, to ecosystems, and are thus dealing with even more complex issues of identifying value, but remain upon the same continuum of trying to justify the concept of inherent value within the natural world. One of the most significant early contributors to such a perspective was Leopold, whose *Sand County Almanac* outlines his view that stresses biotic community (in the sense of symbiotic relationships between living things, including humans, and the environment in which they live) as the way of understanding the ethical approach that should be taken towards the earth. He

emphasises the community nature of ethics *per se*, that ethics are dependent upon the individual's membership of an interdependent community. He identifies ethics as those things that mollify an individual's competition for place in that community, encouraging cooperation. He sums this up as: "Ethics are possibly a kind of community instinct in the making" (Leopold 2001, 107). Of course, for Leopold the concept of community is broader than for other philosophers who might make such an assertion about ethics. He is considering the biotic community of which mankind is a part, rather than a specific human community. He identifies the chief characteristic of the relationship between mankind and the environment as being economic, and states that land is valued only inasmuch as it can produce benefit for human beings (this benefit may be literal, in the case of farming producing food for humans, or aesthetic, in the sense that humans may appreciate the beauty of wilderness). This point of view demonstrates that the earlier ideas of human supremacy which I considered are still very significant in many of the practical ways that humanity relates to the land, almost harking back to the biblical idea of the land as there to be subdued and used for human benefit, and thus devoid of value in other respects. Leopold criticises this view as 'hopelessly lopsided':

It tends to ignore, and thus eventually to eliminate, many elements in the land community that lack commercial value, but that are (as far as we know) essential to its healthy functioning. It assumes, falsely, I think, that the economic parts of the biotic clock will function without the uneconomic parts (Leopold 2001, 122).

Leopold calls for a rethinking of the relationship between mankind and the land, which would drastically refocus ideas of value. He argues that humans, instead of being seen as dominant or superior users of the land, should instead see themselves as part of the land, as part of the biotic community that exists in interdependent balance. By placing humans within the community that should be valued, he intends to increase the valuing by humans of other aspects of the community, and indeed, the community as a whole. Leopold gives the useful analogy of the way that Odysseus was able to hang a large number of slave girls upon his return to Ithaca without being seen as unethical. In that archaic Homeric community slaves were not seen as community members, and thus did not receive the same value as wives. Subsequent ethical theories have been more inclusive, to the extent that now we would consider all humans as having inherent rights, not just those to which our community arbitrarily extends them. Leopold argues for a similar extension of value by a more inclusive idea of community, which does not stop at humans, but recognises the interdependence of all forms of life, and the earth upon which they live. "The Land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants and animals, or collectively; the land" (Leopold 2001, 204). Indeed, this expansion of community is vital for Leopold, who sees his land ethic as a product of social evolution, just as the recognition of human rights has emerged from the processes of social change in the twentieth century. Leopold's approach broadens once again the circle of ethical considerability; no longer just humans and higher mammals, or indeed complex living things, but the interdependent systems of which they are a part. I am not seeking to imply here

that Leopold explicitly recognised subjectivity within these systems, but such recognition is certainly something that process philosophy would support.

Deep Ecology

The next significant position that I will consider on this continuum is that of deep ecology. This is much harder to pin down and explain, as there is no clear definition of what deep ecology actually is. It is an amorphous cluster of ideas, not all of which are held by all those who would call themselves deep ecologists, and some of which are held by those who definitely would not. The origin of the term lies in the work of Arne Naess who put forward a series of contrasts to delineate what he understood as deep ecology. This philosophy emphasises the inherent value of nature rather than the valuing nature for its potential benefit for humans. It is part of a radical revaluing, with an explicit political agenda, which seeks to place the natural world at the centre of value systems. Naess establishes the core values of deep ecology by contrasting it with what he describes as shallow ecology (Naess 2001, 151):

Shallow ecology.	Deep Ecology.
Natural diversity is valuable as a resource for human beings.	Natural diversity has its own intrinsic value.
It is nonsense to talk about value except as value for mankind.	Equating value with value for humans reveals a racial prejudice.
Plant species should be saved because	Plant species should be saved because

of their value as generic reserves for human agriculture and medicine.	of their intrinsic value.
Pollution should be decreased if it threatens economic growth.	Decrease of pollution has priority over economic growth.
Third world population growth threatens ecological equilibrium.	World population at the present level threatens ecosystems but the population and behaviour of industrial states more than that of any others. Human population is today excessive. ²
Resource means resource for humans.	Resource means resource for living beings.
People will not tolerate a broad decrease in their standard of living.	People should not tolerate a broad decrease in the quality of life, but in the standard of living in overdeveloped countries.

² Naess' point of view here is very radical. Indeed, other deep-ecology thinkers have proposed "solutions" to this perceived problem that are extremely unpleasant, and seems to lack any real consideration of any form of ethics. Bookchin sharply critiques this lack of compassion in some areas of deep ecology as "eco-brutalism", where he quite reasonably compares the belief that "famines are nature's "population control" and immigration into the US should be restricted in order to preserve "our ecological resources" (Bookchin 2001, 168) to the ideology that supported the Nazi extermination camps.

Nature is cruel and necessarily so.

Man is cruel, but not necessarily so.

Table 3-1. Deep and Shallow ecology.

Naess stresses the concept of identification (as opposed to alienation) with the natural world as key to understanding deep ecology. He emphasises that within deep ecology, such identification with the natural world is taken seriously.

Through identification, higher level unity is experienced, from identifying with "one's nearest", higher unities are created through circles of friends, local communities, tribes, compatriots, races, humanity, life, and ultimately... unity with the supreme whole, the "world in a broader and deeper sense than the usual" (Naess 2001, 153).

This widening of identification, for Naess, allows the attribution of intrinsic value, not merely to humans, but to all living beings, and indeed, to the natural world as a whole.

It might be argued that this idea of identification with the surrounding world seems to be returning us to the holism that we found in the ideas of process philosophy, but this return is only an apparent one. While it is true that ethics built upon classical process philosophy may have a great deal to say about the treatment of the natural world it is important to differentiate between the ethics predicated upon Whitehead's process philosophy and that which might be predicated upon De Quincey's radical naturalism. While there is no question that, for Whitehead, each actual entity has an intrinsic value, discussion of such value is considerably complicated by Whitehead's insistence upon referring to God as the ultimate

source of value — Whitehead sees the universe as working to provide the maximum range of diversity and intensity of experience for God: he describes God as “luring” (1979, 104) each actual entity towards the kind of prehensions that will result in the greatest variety and intensity of experience for itself. Hartshorne states: “I hold that the ultimate value of human life, or of anything else, consists entirely in the contribution it makes to the divine life” (Hartshorne 1991, 314). A hierarchy of value amongst actual entities further complicates this. Those entities that produce the most intensity of feeling are considered to be more valuable, in that they produce a greater generation of value for God. As Palmer states: “There is no doubt that, for all process thinkers, sentient animals produce the most intense experiences and the highest degrees of value” (Palmer 1998, 49). Such a point of view inevitably implies an ethical primacy for humans and the ‘higher animals’.

It is not difficult to see how Whitehead’s work can support the other areas of the continuum that we have examined, but while these process ethics are of interest, there are areas that require questioning. The first is the whole concept of inherent value in process ethics. If, as I have stated above, actual entities gain a majority of their value from the way in which they contribute to the inherent value of God, this does not seem to be a form of actual ‘inherent’ value, but rather value in a sense very close to that which I identified in Christian stewardship theology: where things are not valued in and of themselves, but because they are valued creations of God, value is a feature that is added to them because of their creation by God, rather than an inherent feature. The idea of ‘inherent’ value in process ethics seems very similar, in that most (although not all) of the value within each actual entity is

predicated upon the intensity and harmony of the experience which that actual entity produces for God, rather than a genuinely 'inherent' value.

De Quincey does a great favour to Whitehead by decoupling God from the whole vision of process philosophy. De Quincey avoids any mention of God, although he uses aspects of Whitehead's thought as foundations for his own radical naturalism, which does not require the active participation of the divine. The 'general potentiality of the universe' exists within actual entities themselves. This also means that actual entities are, in fact, inherently valuable, as with Whitehead, because of their generation of experience, but in and of themselves, not due to any relationship with the divine. De Quincey's argument places us in a position where humans are seen as part of, rather than different from, nature, and where nature is seen as having the same sort of intrinsic value that has traditionally been ascribed to humans:

Because it is good, all that helps sustain it, all that sustains that intrinsic worth is good derivatively, instrumentally, and is worthy of respect on that account. So even the grass no human crofter mows is no mere *res extensa*, devoid of all by extensional properties. It is intrinsically good in its own agenda, as it seeks to live and grow. It has, in addition, an instrumental goodness as it sustains the beasts of forest and field. We are never justified in destroying it or wasting it. Our use of it can never be heedless: it calls for ethical justification. So perceived and so conceived the world is not just a store-house of raw materials. It is value-laden, meaningfully ordered, because it is a community of persons. In a world so experienced, not only a

technical, but also a philosophical ecology — moral ecology in the archaic sense of that term, is in order (Kohák 1992, 377).

Thus far the development of environmental ethics has been driven by a widening of the circle of respect — as more and more *Others* are included in the category of ethically considerable entities. While this widening circle of ethical considerability acknowledges the fundamental insights of both process philosophy and embodiment, there are other approaches which allow a more specific concentration upon a genuine relationship with specific beings within the wider world. In a way, this is setting the philosophical approach that I have considered so far on its head — arguing from direct experience rather than universal principles. I argue that such an approach takes us even closer to the ethic of reciprocal relationship and respect that Holler identified in proposing the erotic ethic.

Ecofeminism.

This emphasis upon relationship as the touchstone of environmental ethics is given its most profound articulation in Plumwood's ecofeminism. While the insights of Naess' deep ecology may bring about a philosophical recognition of the ethical significance of the environment, Plumwood argues that such a position, in emphasising *identification with* rather than *relation to*, is an abstraction that lacks the power that may be found in a more profound, and deeply felt relational position.

Because this "transpersonal" identification is so indiscriminate and intent on denying particular meanings, it cannot allow for the deep and highly

particularistic attachment to place that has motivated both the passion of so many modern conservationists, and the love of so many indigenous peoples for their land (which deep ecology inconsistently tries to treat as a mode). This is based not on a vague, bloodless and abstract cosmological concern, but on the formation of identity, social and personal, in relation to the particular areas of land, yielding ties often as special and powerful as those to kin, and which are equally expressed in very specific and local responsibilities of care (Plumwood 2000, 268).

What Plumwood is arguing for here is an ethical approach that is very much of the body — it begins in the intensity of the relationship with the physical reality that is surrounding the individual, and which is appreciated somatically. It is not a love of nature, as some abstracted philosophical idea — it is the love of *this* place, *this* tree, *this* river, that drives the ethical commitment, the 'responsibility of care'. It is an embodied ethic, experienced in the body's relationships with the surrounding world. Plumwood seeks to disengage from the traditional intellectual approach of academic philosophy that seeks to articulate broad universal approaches, and instead argues for the ecofeminist approach that Warren identifies as being characterised by *taking relationships seriously*, an approach which "stands in contrast to a strictly reductionist modality that takes relationships seriously only or primarily because of the nature of the *relators* or parties to those relationships" (Warren 1990, 135). Relationship, for Plumwood's ecofeminism, is the thing that comes first, and from the ultimate primacy of the experienced relationship grows

the ethical imperative for engagement on behalf of the environment. Thus ecofeminism;

provides a way of conceiving of ethics and ethical meaning as emerging out of particular situations moral agents find themselves in, rather than as being imposed on those situations (Warren 1990, 136).

Thus it is not some kind of Kantian universal rule, but rather a deeply felt, experienced response to the world that actually surrounds us. It resonates strongly with Ingold's understanding of animism as an embodied relationship with particular places, and also addresses the critique of 'honouring nature' raised by Hooker, who is critical of:

the hollow piety of which I accused the 'new' environmentalist vocabulary, in particular to the exhortation to regard nature or The Environment with reverence. Taken seriously, this would mean that each of us should regard everything in nature in somewhat the way that, say, a person in Benares views the Ganges. And that implies that the exhortation cannot be taken seriously. If the fashion of expressing reverence towards everything spreads, we shall simply need a new word for what used to be meant by 'reverence'. For it is absurd to suppose that the kind of attitude held by the Hindus to their river could be held by everyone towards everything... A person can only revere what enters into his life, and which belongs, prominently so, within his field of significance (Hooker 1992, 174).

While I have to admit that I am uncomfortable with the rather colonial tone of the example given, Hooker does raise an important point – how can one treat nature with reverence? The solution is provided by Hooker himself; that one can revere ‘what enters into his life’, i.e. those things with which we are in direct relationship. For both Ingold and Plumwood, this is understood as the direct experience of the direct locality, not a reverence for nature as an abstraction.

Relationship is the key

The connection between the ideas of embodiment discussed in the last chapter, and the continuum of environmental ethics may seem to be growing stronger, but there are a number of thinkers whose work is increasingly being called upon to narrow that gap even further by problematizing the issue of ‘ethical considerability’ between ourselves and those to whom we relate, emphasizing instead the ethical significance of relationship itself. This approach is one that Bauman privileges in his search for a postmodern ethic – which he says must be: “An ethics that restores the autonomous moral significance of proximity; an ethics that recasts the Other as the crucial character in the process through which the moral self comes into its own” (Bauman 1993, 84). Such an approach at once returns us to some of the primary concerns of embodiment.

One of the most significant contributions to such an approach has been made in the work of Martin Buber. The key element of Buber’s thought is the ‘I-Thou’ exchange.

³ Here he privileges the whole concept of encounter as the primary way of understanding existence. For Buber, existence is composed of a number of encounters between the self and the Other; “In the beginning is the relation” (Buber 1970, 69). He describes these encounters as being of two types; the first is ‘I-It’, where the other is seen as an object, a thing. Here the Other (whether an idea, an object, a person) is quite literally objectified, seen and understood only in terms of its utility to the ‘I’. This obviously has considerable resonance with the Cartesian *res extensa* — if the Other that I encounter is ‘merely stuff’, then I am free to behave towards it as I choose, exploiting it for my own benefit. The other relationship, the ‘I-Thou’ relationship, is quite different. It is a significant existential and authentic relationship between two beings and, significantly, it grants ethical recognition to the Other. Such relationships are seen as significant encounters where some form of mutuality and exchange takes place: “one should not try to dilute the meaning of the relation, relation is reciprocity” (Buber 1970, 58). For Buber everything depends upon the reciprocal relationship — it is not a case that anything is inherently either an ‘it’ or a ‘thou’ — “Every You in the world is doomed by its nature to become a thing, or at least to enter into thinghood again and again... everything in the world can... appear to some I as it’s You” (Buber 1970, 69). Buber’s understanding of the ‘I-Thou’ relationship is that it is possible to have a meaningful encounter with anything — this is not merely limited to other human persons. As one of the examples in his book, he refers to an ‘I-Thou’ encounter with a tree: “As I contemplate the tree I am drawn into a relation, and the tree ceases to

³ While classically phrased as ‘I-Thou’, some translators, such as Walter Kaufmann, use the term ‘I-You’.

be an It. The power of exclusiveness has seized me" (Buber 1970, 58). The 'I-Thou' relationship is one of mutually interdependent reciprocity, but the key here is that inter-relationship — as Buber says, "Does the tree have consciousness, similar to our own? I have no experience of that" (Buber 1970, 58). The fact of the relationship, of its authenticity and depth, is sufficient. Buber emphasises that Nature is indeed amenable to the reciprocity of being:

It is altogether different with those realms of nature which lack the spontaneity that we share with animals. It is part of our concept of the plant that it cannot react to our actions upon it, that it cannot "reply." Yet this does not mean that we meet with no reciprocity at all in this sphere. We find here not the deed of posture of an individual being, but a reciprocity of being itself — a reciprocity that has nothing except being... What matters in this sphere is that we should do justice with an open mind to the actuality that opens up before us (Buber 1970, 171).

This emphasis upon the existential relationship with the Other resonates deeply with the ideas of interiority that we encountered in process thinking and embodiment, particularly the significance of the inter-relationship between the embodied individual and the surrounding world. This significance is acknowledged by Kohák, who argues that conventional understanding of discourse as a transfer of information is a misconception that limits the ways in which we can potentially recognize Others as 'Thou':

It is a matter of recognizing such beings as “Thou” — not as a mute “it”, but as a fellow being in a community of discourse. If that assertion sounds unusual it may be in great part because we tend to think of discourse theoretically, as an exchange of information in a definite natural language. A conversation between two computers may in fact be no more than that. Human discourse, however, is just as likely to be a matter of shared silences, of exchanged gestures and hints, intended as much to acknowledge the Other as to exchange information. It does not depend entirely upon an exchange of words. The community of those we address includes adults who are deaf and mute, as well as infants, and domestic animals. It is, first and foremost, a community of respectful transaction which among humans, is indicated by speaking (Kohák 1992, 372).

Levinas’s philosophy also privileges the idea of the encounter between the self and the Other — an encounter that he describes as taking place ‘face to face’. However, for Levinas, ethics do not arise *from* this encounter, but the encounter takes place against a ground of ethics that are already present. His fundamental position is that ‘ethics comes first’; it is not merely pre-rational but pre-experiential, it is the ground against which the form of actions take place:

The responsibility for the other (*autrui*) cannot have begun in my commitment, in my decision. The unlimited responsibility in which I find myself comes from the hither side of my freedom, from an “anterior to every memory”, and “ulterior to every accomplishment”, from the

nonpresent par excellence, the nonoriginal, the anarchical, prior to or beyond essence (Levinas 2002, 117).

Each individual's responsibility for the other is the primary fact of human existence. Levinas even describes this responsibility as the nature of subjectivity itself; "...to identify the I with morality" (Levinas 1996, 55). It is not something that can be rationalised; existing as it does before thought, even before the experience of the present moment. Levinas's approach is different to Buber's; he discards the concept of reciprocity, positing instead that ethical concern is the precursor to the encounter:

Intersubjective relation is a non-symmetrical relation. In this sense, I am responsible for the Other without waiting for reciprocity, were I to die for it. Reciprocity is his affair... I am responsible for a total responsibility, which answers for all the others and for all in the others, even for their responsibility (Levinas 1985, 98-9).

Putnam argues that Levinas regards the essential nature of human life:

in any sense that is 'worthy of the name' — involve [s] recognizing that one is obliged to make oneself available to the neediness of the Other without simultaneously regarding the Other as so obliged (Putnam 2002, 55).

Thus for Levinas, ethical concern comes first, the obligation to care for the Other is the *a priori* state. Levinas refers to the idea of 'the face' as the way in which we encounter the Other – "the encounter with the face – that is, moral consciousness, can be described as the condition of consciousness *tout court*" (Levinas 2002, 11). In

this short quote one may find a distillation of three of the most significant elements of Levinas's thought. Firstly, that one meets the Other through an encounter with the face, secondly, that this encounter is, by its very nature, a profound form of ethics, and thirdly, that the primary condition of consciousness itself is ethical concern – 'ethics comes first'.

Bauman describes Levinas's philosophy as beginning with "the vision of caress as the paradigm of moral relationship" (Bauman 1993, 92), an approach that is both a profound primary metaphor of embodiment, and also resonates deeply with both Holler's ideas about an erotic morality and Merleau-Ponty's description of the way in which the self and the world join together in the construction of reality. Levinas's approach to the relationship between the self and the Other has become a significant inspiration for many thinkers, particularly in relation to the environment. This position is not unchallenged: Welsh critiques this use of Levinas's philosophy by stating:

When Levinas suggests (as he does perhaps most famously) that it is the "face" of the "other" that makes an essential and primary ethical claim on the "self" (1993), he is talking about the human face of a human other, infinitely capable of resisting apprehension, possession, or conquest by a human self. He is, however, making a more general and radical point about the primacy of ethics and relations to others within philosophy over an epistemological quest for truth and absolute understanding (Welsh 1998, 50).

Levinas himself, however, does not rule out the possibility of a more than human face eliciting ethical response. He asks: "Can things take on a face? Is not art an activity that lends faces to things? Does not the facade of a house regard us? The analysis thus far does not suffice for an answer" (Levinas 2002, 10). This at least opens the door for those who wish to broaden Levinas's ideas to include a more-than / other-than human Other. Levinas's ideas have been used by some Pagan academics in their attempt to articulate a Pagan approach to the environment. Ezzy (2004) argues that a re-reading of Levinas enables a re-conceptualization of the face to face encounter with the Other, which can be broadened out to include nature. Ezzy quotes Davis' argument that, for Levinas, the concept of 'face' should not be understood in a literal way (as a 'human face'), but in a more sophisticated interpretation,

.. for Levinas it is before all else the channel through which alterity presents itself to me, and as such it lies outside and beyond what can be seen and experienced (Ezzy 2004a, 23).

Ezzy concludes that the encounter with nature as the Other (which he emphasises can occur in both rural and urban settings), are legitimate examples of ethical inter-relationship. Davy (2005) acknowledges as a starting point that "Levinas presents ethical relations in terms of the transcendence of nature, effectively devaluing the natural world" (Davy 2005, 157). Davy resolves this seemingly intractable contradiction by putting forward the position that it is not nature that needs to be transcended for ethics to flourish, but one's "self-centred orientation in the world" (Davy 2005, 162). She concludes that Levinas's anthropocentric ethic of the 'face to

face' encounter with the Other can be understood in a much broader sense as "it is not only human Others that can interrupt one's view of the world, but any Other, human or otherwise" (Davy 2005, 162). Such an approach makes more sense given the other essential difference between the two thinkers — while Levinas writes from a Jewish viewpoint, Davy writes as a contemporary Pagan. I will explore some of the implications of this identity more fully in a later chapter, but for the moment will accept that Davy's suggestion that the site and direction of transcendence are moved makes much more sense in this context — for many Pagans there is nothing above or outside nature, so it would make no sense to discuss 'transcending nature'. Davy states that nature is in fact "the numinous Other, infinite transcendence, always more than we can comprehend" (Davy 2005, 169). She explicitly rejects biocentric and ecocentric ethics, and concludes that Levinas's approach to the face of the Other provides a particularly Pagan approach to ethics — recognizing that "nonhuman others can also make demands on me, and can inspire ethics in me" (Davy 2005, 170).

Embodied Ethics?

This brief survey of some recent ideas in environmental ethics may seem quite a jump from the previous chapter's discussion of embodiment, but I argue that in fact the two concepts mutually inter-relate. I assert that it may be possible to practise an embodied ethic located in an experience of the inter-relationship between the embodied self and the other interiorities that compose the world that surrounds it. This chapter has outlined a continuum of development that moves away from a Cartesian, mechanistic universe, where *res extensa* is at the beck and call of

(exclusively human) *res cogitans*, through a process of assigning value, initially in terms of value to humans, and then in terms of recognising 'human—like' teleological subjectivity in other creatures. Value is then ascribed in a wider and wider circle to include all that lives, and finally all that is. But merely identifying that these things have an inherent value is insufficient for the creation of an ethic — certainly not for embodied beings, encountering one another through experience, through faces and, both literally and figuratively, through touch. Both Levinas and Buber help us to start thinking about those moments of genuine relationship, when ethical concern really begins to flow. While other scholars (Ezzy, Davy) argue that Levinas's ideas are more significant, in that they situate ethics as the *fons et origo* from which all other existence derives, I would follow Kohák in understanding Buber's vision as one that acknowledges the value of the beings which whom we are in community by an appropriate relational approach: "Nature...is not a theoretical concept but something to be encountered and addressed directly, as a fellow being in all its immediacy, an object of empathy, not simply of manipulation" (Kohák 1992, 376). York also problematizes Levinas as providing a suitable philosophical starting point for Pagans, due to "his insistent emphasis on the complete and utter Otherness of God who, at the same time, is the source of all that is good and worthwhile in this world" (York 2010 , 91).

Process philosophy, certainly in De Quincey's terms, reinforces our understanding of this as a genuine encounter — seeing it not as the anthropomorphisation of an aesthetic position, but as relationship with a genuine subjective interiority, an Other that in many ways is much more profoundly 'like the self' than much western

thought (even that articulated by deep ecology) would previously grant, and indeed is situated very close to Holler's ideas about what an erotic ethic might look like, one that is founded in reciprocal relationship, where:

tactile consciousness can allow us to feel kinship to the myriad of things that create, sustain and nourish us,... and the feeling of being comforted may provide us with the moral strength to give that care back (Holler 2002, 172).

It is also one predicated upon relationship, where we "find ourselves in dialogue with and limited by other species' needs, other kinds of minds" (Plumwood 2009).

In assembling the foundational *bricolage* for this thesis, it is surprising quite how readily the components, which may initially seem to come from such a wide range of sources, butt up against one another to form a tight bond. I will now pull together those components to support the development of my argument.

I begin with the nature of the modernist construction of ethics. Where ethics does enter public discourse in contemporary society it does so in two ways; either in terms of revelation, an espousal of traditional religious ethics (even though the conventional forms of religious practice may be waning, the appeal to traditional religious ethics is still one of the most frequently encountered), or in terms of the intellect, as part of a rational argument. Ethics is seen as the purview of a particular kind of professional philosopher, done in the abstract, and always taking place embedded within the intellect, in the service of 'pure reason'. Smith critiques these formal approaches to ethics, suggesting that:

Formal ethics misconstrues and eviscerates our actual moral feelings in order to incorporate them, as pale shadows of their former selves, into a hierarchical society where others take decisions for us (Smith 2001, 16).

A good example of this narrow ownership was the public debate on 'citizen ethics' organised by *the Guardian* at the British Museum (Guardian 2010). The three 'experts' invited to debate these issues in public were Rowan Williams (The Archbishop of Canterbury), Michael Sandell (Professor of Political Philosophy at Harvard), and Diane Coyle (an economist). This selection is illuminating in that it

clearly situates both ethics and ethical expertise as being owned by a narrowly defined group of experts: a group that is understood as divided between the academy and the Church. When ethics does emerge in its 'common sense' form in public discourse, it is always influenced by one of these perspectives.

This claim of exclusive ownership of ethics by particular groups, particularly with relation to Paganism, was very clearly articulated in a 'debate' on the BBC programme *The Big Questions* (BBC 2010). While the nature of the programme is one that encourages confrontation between different perspectives (indeed the question being discussed was: 'Is Paganism more relevant than Christianity?') there were a couple of points that are worthy of note. The point was made vociferously by both Christian and Jewish contributors to the discussion that 'Paganism lacked a moral compass' because it was based in nature. They opined that only those religious traditions that were informed by divine laws could have any ethical teaching that was relevant for mankind. There are two germane points that can be extracted from this. Firstly, that there was a clear impression that authoritative statements about ethics could only be made by experts (and this was both explicitly stated and implied in the attitudes of the clergy, of the laity, and of the broadcasters). Secondly, any unfamiliar approach to ethical thinking was simply wrong, misinformed, or deluded.

In common with some of the Pagan representatives on that programme, I argue that the converse is true, and that different ways of doing ethics do need to be explored. Amongst these, the approach suggested by embodiment may provide a powerful, universalising, and novel way of approaching ethics. The body and its

inter-relationship with the world would be the situation to explore if one was to find a new way of approaching ethics. Such an ethic would have the great advantage of being open to all, requiring no study of complex philosophies, or adherence to particular religious viewpoints. Although different kinds of training — both a difficult and drawn-out letting go of the deeply rooted ontological dualism, and a learning to listen, either to the wisdom of the body, or the voice of nature — are required. This potential for universal democratisation is what Bauman recognises in his analysis of Levinas and Ouaknin when he prioritises the 'caress' as the primary allegory for understanding ethics:

The caressing hand, characteristically, remains open, never tightening into a grip, never "getting hold of"; it touches without pressing, it moves obeying the shape of the caressed body (Bauman 1993, 92).

Such an ethic is one predicated upon inter-relationship, open to all, yet allowing one to flow to respond in a genuinely reciprocal manner to the other. It is an ethical 'primary metaphor' — an internal process that can only be really comprehended through the experience of embodiment. This reciprocal relationship with the other may be framed and understood through process philosophy — which suggests that the other (indeed all others) possesses an interiority, not necessarily like our own but sufficient that, in Nagel's terms there is: "something that it is like to be a bat" (Nagel 1974, 438). Thus the significance of inter-relationship is central to this approach to embodiment; as embodied beings we are embedded in the surrounding world, inter-relating with a greater community of 'actual entities'. As Csordas points out: "studies under the rubric of embodiment are not 'about the

body' *per se*... they are about culture and experience insofar as these can be understood from a bodily being-in-the-world" (Csordas 1999, 143).

Now, on one level we may argue that, if such an ethic exists, then it should be obvious and easily observed, verging upon the commonsensical. The position of embodiment is, after all, a universal truth. The dominance of the Cartesian dualist ontology over the post-enlightenment western mind has effectively concealed this, not merely from the academic vision, but also from our own self-understanding. I have argued that the *habitus* of contemporary westerners is a tendency to think of ourselves (indeed we are positively trained and conditioned to think of ourselves) in Cartesian terms, a tendency that is constantly reinforced by both our socialisation and our use of language. The embodied ethic that I've theorised above is therefore something that must be deliberately sought out, and I suggest that contemporary Paganism is a good place to begin our hunt.

When I first began my research, I was working from a particular understanding of Paganism, which as we shall see in the next chapter, is in fact a rather more problematic and fluid identity than the usual rhetoric might suggest. My approach was framed by the understandings outlined in the rest of this chapter, many of which I will critique, expand or reject in subsequent chapters. The first of these is the common Pagan rhetoric which valorises the physical. What I mean by this is that Paganism largely repudiates the ontological dualism of the Cartesian approach (often consciously), and situates its practices firmly within the physical world. The fact that it is common to describe Paganism as an orthopraxy (held together by similar actions) suggests at once the significance of the physical. The bottom line of

being Pagan, for many Pagans, is that their most profound spiritual activities are things that they do with their bodies. As Pike states:

There is a knowledge about festivals that exists only in my body, a knowledge that I gained through movement... NeoPagans... construct their identities around the fire by moving back and forth between verbal and somatic ways of knowing (Pike 2001, 189).

It is often argued that ritual is the way in which Pagans return most profoundly to the experience of their own embodiment, and its broader inter-relationship with the world around them. Salomonsen argues that embodiment is the most important feature of ritual:

But the most important feature of ritualization is that all its strategies are rooted in the body... It is this bodily strategy that produces an incarnate means of knowing, and that makes possible effective confirmation or transformation. The primacy of the body in a ritualized environment is what, in fact, distinguishes ritualization from other social strategies (Salomonsen 2002, 163).

Another key support for this approach was the rhetoric of great flexibility and creativity within Paganism; there is a frequent self-conscious rejection of modernist ways of purely rational thought, a desire to *re-enchant* 21st century life with openness to pre-modern ways of viewing and relating to the world. Finally, there is the considerable rhetoric about the primacy of nature across all the diverse traditions of Paganism, even if, as I have demonstrated, there is no persistent

agreement as to the best way to understand nature. One way of illustrating this is to consider Taylor’s four types of ‘Dark Green Religion’ (Taylor 2009, 15), which he describes thus:

	Animism	Gaian Earth religion
Supernaturalism	Spiritual Animism	Gaian Spirituality
Naturalism	Naturalistic Animism	Gaian Naturalism

It is particularly interesting that one could find examples from contemporary Paganism that would fit into each of the four categories (if not move across them). The key point though is that *all* such examples are within the diagram. They *all* participate, to a greater or lesser extent, in Taylor’s ‘dark green’ (i.e. nature centred) religion. I thus argue that, if one is going to look for an embodied ethic, an ethic that arises directly from experience, contemporary Paganism should prove to be the richest potential hunting ground.

It also made sense to suggest that Pagans are likely to be open to the idea of an embodied relationship with the natural world. It is significant that what I mean here by relationship is more frequently articulated as an ‘I-thou’ inter-relationship with nature, rather than the symbolic understanding that one might find in ecological circles. The shamanic practitioner, Gordon the Toad, describes this key difference thus:

I find deep ecologists celebrate the relationships between things, and the need for recognising the very fundamental nature of those relationships, but where they do talk about “other awareness-es” or other consciousness, they don’t really mean it. It seems to be used more as a way of you projecting yourself into something else, to look at the world from a different perspective. So “I will think like a tree” and see what it’s like being a tree, but there isn’t the suggestion that actually, why don’t you just go and talk to the blooming tree, it can tell you more about being a tree than what you think it’s like being a tree, and you might find that its perspectives of treeness are so totally different from anything that we can imagine, that you need a leafy slap round the face that says “no actually, all you are ever doing is imagining” (MacLellan 2004a).

Such a point of view is echoed by Kohák, “it is quite appropriate to speak to a tree even though the tree will not respond with words, but in the way appropriate to its own kind” (Kohák 1992, 377); a position which resonates profoundly with Buber’s ‘I–Thou’ encounter with the tree. The wide range of literature, from both academics studying Paganism and from those within the tradition, emphasizes that the idea of inter-relation is explicitly acknowledged within many forms of Paganism. It is also a frequent part of the cosmological discourse of Pagans.

This embodied relationship is likely to be something that is acknowledged and celebrated. Having a relationship with the natural world is likely to be something that Pagans acknowledge, both in terms of their shared discourse, and in their own spiritual practices; it is certainly something that is paramount in the vast majority of

public facing literature on Paganism. Most forms of Paganism provide practitioners with a language, world-view or mythological cosmology for exploring and articulating this kind of inter-relation. The wide variety of Pagan discourse acknowledges nature spirits, *genius loci*, green men, dryads, land-wights, faeries, animals regarded as significant (such as cats or hedgehogs), human or other-than-human ancestors, spirits of rocks and rivers, gods and spirits of particular places, as well as 'nature divinities' such as gods of harvest and the forest, goddesses of the sea or of the moon.

This embodied inter-relationship is likely to be deepened through specific physical practices. There are several kinds of these which may be important for pagans. The first are those where individuals spend more time consciously living in nature. As I discussed at the end of chapter two, it is likely that individuals may be able to develop a *habitus* of ethical conduct through their relationship to a particular place. Ingold describes this as an embodied knowing:

It is knowledge, not of a formal, authorised kind, transmissible in contexts outside those of its practical application. On the contrary, it is based in feeling, consisting in the skills, sensitivities and orientations that have developed through long experience of conducting one's life in a particular environment (Ingold 2000, 25).

This relationship to a particular environment is also significant in Smith's understanding of the development of ecological ethics:

This requires practical “ecological” sense that can only come from an awareness, a feeling, for what is fitting with respect to natural places and our nonhuman fellows, and this feeling can, in turn, only come about through practicing and experiencing the desire and wonder that natural others can produce in our lives... Genuine ethical “expertise” comes only from a life that is lived openly and sensitively, not from an abstract ability to manipulate esoteric language (Smith 2001, 216).

Thus for both Ingold and Smith the first way in which one might relate ethically to the environment is through that basic primal relation of experiential living. This is not some intellectually constructed expertise or discourse, but rather the knowledge of correct and beneficial action that arises from conscious living. This insists, in the same way as ecofeminism, upon an experience of the environment that is local and personal; directly relational rather than abstracted — ‘this tree here’ rather than ‘trees in general’.

Pagans may also consciously develop their relationship with nature through specifically and self-consciously ‘spiritual’ embodied activities — through ritual practice, shamanic trance journeys, by acknowledging wights, making offerings to spirits of place, invoking deities associated with particular places, invoking elemental spirits, devotional practices to particular local deities, drumming and dancing, honouring or acknowledging particular animals or animal spirits, some forms of ancestor veneration, setting an extra place at a meal for the beloved dead, leaving offerings or making ritual at ancient sites, or even simply approaching particular places with an attitude of reverence. These are all different components

of the various approaches that may be part of Pagan practice. They all have in common the idea of wider, two-way inter-relation with the surrounding natural world, which may be deepened through a practice that encourages a stronger relationship, or may be thought of as 'listening in a different way', as MacLellan explains:

It's easy if you just step out of your own head long enough to do it. I think that the difference lies in one of those images I've used before, it's about living in the world, and everyone lives in the world, it's just about being aware of it (MacLellan 2004a).

Others may be more profoundly spiritually influenced by other practices, which may seem less 'spiritual', but in fact drive a deepening inter-relationship with the natural world — so gardening, swimming in the sea or a river, walking in a forest, climbing a mountain, tending a fire, or sitting still in the sun, may be significant for some individuals. The significance of some of these seemingly mundane activities in deepening relationship with the natural world is described neatly by River Jones:

I have a relationship with a tree that's the nearest, the nearest large-sized tree to my house, and, it's very hard to put into words, but I know that if I spend time with a tree, by spending time with a tree it would mean being quiet, and lying under, or sitting against, or sitting up the tree, and just relaxing and thinking about opening myself up to communication with the tree itself. There have been moments when it has been like drinking up moments of awareness of what it might be like to be a tree, and to have sort

of the size of the tree, and to have the relationship with light and water and earth that the tree has, and how much more peaceful that is than being a human being, so I can come away with just a little bit of that peace. And there's just some sense that I get that the tree consciousness gets something from that exchange as well, the consciousness that I can have much more direct exchanges with are animal, human consciousnesses. You kind of get a sense when a person or an animal has enjoyed you paying attention to it, and you get the same sort of sense from a tree (Jones 2004).

Such a somatic, embodied relationship, which is so often consciously acknowledged and celebrated, is certainly going to have some kind of influence upon ethical decision making or action, particularly with regard to the environment.

My expectation that Pagan ethics are essentially rooted somehow in nature is echoed by many others. This is either glossed as being positive, such as Moreton's comments in a *Guardian* piece entitled 'Everyone's a Pagan Now':

For many Pagans, becoming a green campaigner is a way of demonstrating faith with practical action. For many activists who come at it from the opposite direction, the Pagan idea of an ancient and universal spirit that animates the earth gives their actions a personal, spiritual framework (Moreton 2009, 6).

Having said that, it may be negative, with the emphasis upon the undesirability of learning from 'nature red in tooth and claw', as encountered in the BBC debate

mentioned earlier. I am more interested, however, in what Harris describes as a 'sacred ecology':

which moves beyond the cerebral to bring us to a direct experience of a wholeness rooted in the body... [which calls us to] act to protect our Earth because we know, in every cell of our bodies, that our lives, our communities and our land are sacred (Harris 1996, 151 & 153).

This kind of attitude, where action and activism arise from the direct embodied experience of being immersed in the world, is precisely the kind of ethic that I believe may emerge from a study of Pagan practice.

Unlike most forms of ethical discourse that we are used to, an embodied ethic will be particularly difficult to discuss or articulate. Most forms of ethics, being either rational or revealed, are simple to discuss. They are consistently presented in rational, discursive terms. An embodied ethic will, by its very nature, be harder to explore. It is most likely to be expressed through action, gesture, or lifeway; expressions that are not always easy to articulate in words. As Smith points out, however, the privileging of ethical rationalisation may be at the expense of authentic experience: "The end result of this process of rationalization is the complete alienation of the person from their moral potential, from the values that would make them real rather than abstract and impoverished individuals" (Smith 2001, 159). Trying to articulate it in words will inevitably lead to an attempt to filter it through the intellect, which may lead to 'cross contamination'. If we consider the whole business of asking someone on a protest camp '*Why are you here?*', the very

fact that this is being asked as an oral question requires an intellectual rational engagement to process an answer. There is also a tendency in human discussion to justify our decisions using the terms that others may most readily understand. Thus someone on a protest site may initially talk about their 'low impact life style', or the necessity of 'opposing big oil', as if they will feel more comfortable that their interlocutor will take them more seriously than if they said 'Because I feel that this place is sacred'.

In this way the central question of my thesis is established: Is it true that Pagans are, through practise of ritual and a spiritual valorisation of the environment, more likely to be open to embodied ways of doing ethics? Considering the widespread Pagan rhetoric around nature, such embodiment is likely to be involved in their relationship to the environment. It would therefore follow that Pagans are more likely to be actively engaged with these issues. This approach would seem to be supported by other recent research in the field. Lassander suggests that Pagans share a similar set of values, arising from their [embodied] activities:

Considering that Paganism is very loosely if at all organised, the relative homogeneity of Pagan values is intriguing. It can be seen to imply that Paganism acts, in kind of an inverted Durkheimian way, as a symbol for a set of values that then defines the community (Lassander 2009, 93).

Oboler states: "Statistically Pagans are more likely to take environmentalist positions and actions and engage in environmentally sound lifestyle practices"

(Oboler 2004, 104), and the majority of other academic writers on Paganism tend to make this assumption as well.

5. Methodological Reflection

In order to begin addressing the questions that I was asking I needed to establish two things. Firstly, I needed to establish if an embodied ethic was actually something that might be observed to arise from Pagan practice and experience. Secondly, I needed to determine how widespread such an ethic might be in the general Pagan community. These are two very different kinds of question; the former teases out deep questions from individual experience, and the latter tries to establish whether or not a behaviour or attitude is normative in a community. These would seem to require two different kinds of research. I determined quite early on that I would have to use qualitative research techniques (ethnographic approaches including interviews and participant observation) to answer the first question, and quantitative research techniques (analysis of questionnaire results) to answer the second. Such a combination of techniques has historically been viewed as rather unusual, but it is becoming increasingly common. I support the argument that that the two approaches inter-relate, and provide a degree of mutual support. I agree with Jick "that qualitative and quantitative methods should be viewed as complementary rather than as rival camps" (Jick 1983, 135), and that triangulation between the two will act as a "compensation of the weaknesses and blind spots of each single method" (Flick 2006, 37). Such triangulation has contributed to research on environmental attitudes however, with Machnaghten & Urry reporting that:

The quantitative data emphasise the importance to people of the Global aspects of the environment. This is by contrast with the findings of the

qualitative research... which highlights the particular and local components (Macnaghten and Urry 1998, 101).

I further argue that this combined approach is particularly important as it is different from the majority of academic studies of Paganism to date, which have tended to concentrate upon ethnographic studies of small groups of Pagans (Luhrmann 1989, Berger 1999, Greenwood 2000, Letcher 2001, Pike 2001, Blain 2002, Salomonsen 2002, Wallis 2003, Bado-Fralick 2005), rather than attempting to research quantitative information about 'Paganism as a whole'. Where larger scale quantitative research has been conducted, such as the Pagan Census (Berger, Leach and Shaffer 2003) or the COG Census — this has tended to focus upon broader, quantifying measures — fundamentally to see how many Pagans there are. However, my quantitative study was planned to enable me to establish the extent to which the ideas revealed by the qualitative work might be representative of Paganism as a whole.

Quantitative Research

Having established this combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches as the best way forward, planning the questionnaire proved to be challenging in many respects. There were many questions that I wanted to ask, but I quickly realised that I had to consider the volume of data that might be returned, and how this might best be used as a research tool. I needed to consider various issues in order to find a balance between getting a useful level of response, and producing a volume that I could actually cope with analysing. The first of these issues was the

questionnaire itself, where I considered various different options. While there are advantages to a pen and paper questionnaire, and indeed greater ones to personally conducted interviews, such approaches would have inevitably limited the scope of the research to those people who I could either physically reach (for face to face interviews) or to whom I could publicise and distribute it. Considering the ubiquity of the internet in modern communications, particularly so for Pagans, and that the information I was looking for was broadly attitudinal and could be recorded in a simple fashion, I decided to use an on-line questionnaire, accessible through a website that would automatically collate responses. Data from the questionnaire could be easily collected using this method and it should be easy for many people to access it (though, of course, this approach is also exclusive in that it excludes those without web access). While this meant that the format of the questionnaire was inevitably simplified, this was in keeping with Sanchez's observation that "the format of self-administered instruments... are less complex and burdensome than the average standardized instrument handled by survey interviewers" (Sanchez 1992, 207). I decided that a simple and straightforward questionnaire that was easy for respondents to work through would increase the likelihood of people both completing it, and telling others about the survey.

The key target group for the survey was those who identify themselves as Pagan. Self-identification is the most frequently accepted method for identifying those who are Pagans, but there are issues arising from this. Firstly there is the whole issue that Paganism is what Berger refers to as a "hidden population" (Berger, Leach and Shaffer 2003, xvii), and therefore "the best procedures for recruiting

representative samples are simply impractical for the study of such groups" (Berger, Leach and Shaffer 2003, xviii). Bainbridge's suggestion that "If the aim is to develop or test general theories rather than to estimate population parameters, then non-random samples may be quite satisfactory" (Bainbridge 2007, 8), supports this methodology, as the purpose of the survey is precisely to test a general theory. My respondents were people who, by choosing to answer the questionnaire, were self-identifying as Pagan. Thanks to personal contacts that I had gained in the course of this research, I was fortunate enough to be able to publicise the questionnaire twice in *Pagan Dawn* in the UK, and, running online, it quickly picked up an international following through Pagan on-line communities, blogs and e-lists.⁴ Secondly, I needed to consider that there is also a substantial minority of people who were doing things that are relevant to this research that their friends and co-workers might identify as 'Pagan', but who shy away from the term, or would refuse it as an identification, and would therefore be unlikely to complete the survey. Practical considerations made it unlikely that such people would be likely to complete the survey — but these attitudes and behaviours did emerge in the qualitative work (a good example of the complementarity of triangulation). Fry et al. suggest that there are:

a number of distinct advantages to be derived from merging qualitative and quantitative techniques, such as more refined and relevant conceptualisation, better understanding of residual unexplained variance, more valid empirical indicators, more meaningful interpretation of

⁴ The Quarterly Magazine of the Pagan Federation in the UK — circulation of 3000.

quantitative data, and finally new theoretical insights (Fry, Chantavich and Chantavich 1981, 155).

This is an excellent example of the way that the two research techniques can work together.

An internet survey can be used in a variety of ways, and it would be easy to record comparatively large textual responses. Such an approach would not really fulfil the requirements that I had of this survey (to produce numerical data which could be analysed and used to explore the ideas emerging from the qualitative research); it would also potentially produce a vast amount of data that might be difficult to interpret or pull together in any coherent way. As the purpose of the questionnaire was to gather largely 'attitudinal' responses, it focussed on the extent to which respondents agree or disagree with a number of statements. These statements were largely of my own devising — and were divided up into a number of categories which were then "mixed up" on the pages of the questionnaire so that respondents had to consider each one in isolation from statements about similar issues, which also allowed an assessment of consistency in the responses, and avoided issues to do with primacy and recency. There were statements to measure both attitudes to various issues, and prior engagement with those issues, as well as more general attitudinal statements. This technique inevitably leads to closed questions, and a limited creativity in responses — but produces material that is both straightforward to analyse, and comparable with pre-existing qualitative data.

I chose to use Lickert scales as the method of providing response — these are ideal for my purpose as they provide a simple, numerical level of response, which is ideal for comparative evaluation using analytical software. As Oppenheim suggests, “Lickert scales tend to perform very well when it comes to a reliable, rough ordering of people with regard to a particular attitude” (Oppenheim 1973, 141). There is considerable variance of practice as to the size of the scale offered to respondents — many Lickert scales give up to ten options (between ‘strongly disagree’, and ‘strongly agree’, for example), but I rejected such a broad range as being impractical. While such a broad range allows a greater breadth of response, it also tends to encourage ‘clumping’ of results, and without the ability to specifically define how ‘point four differs from point five’ it is pointless. There is also debate about the effectiveness of giving respondents a broad range of possibilities: it might be better to give respondents four options rather than five, as it is suggested that the middle option of five is often selected by default, rather than as a positive value. While there might be mileage in this argument, I designed the questionnaire from the point of view that by giving a specific descriptor for each value (on each page), my questionnaire avoided this automatic defaulting of selection. I think that, in retrospect, this was an error, and I should not always have defined each point, merely the two extremes, as definitions were not necessarily helpful here. As Oppenheim points out:

With regard to the neutral point on the scale, we must agree that this is not necessarily the midpoint between the two extreme scale scores; moreover,

scores in the middle region could be due to lukewarm response, lack of knowledge, or lack of attitude in the respondent (Oppenheim 1973, 141).

In fact, two respondents critiqued the use of the term *ambivalent* as the central term on some of (though very far from all) the Lickert scales used to record responses, suggesting that ambivalence did not precisely sum up how they felt about particular issues. This serves to underline the dilemma. By seeking to use specific titles for the five points on the scale, in order to avoid clumping or default selection, I have inadvertently used a term that is open to critique from some respondents. I also assumed that the five point Lickert scale would allow individuals to complete the questionnaire in a comparatively short space of time, and I believed that this would also lead to a much higher rate of response than a more complex or drawn-out questionnaire. As respondents were choosing to complete the survey, I needed to ensure that the website was easy to use, simple to navigate, and friendly in appearance. On the front page of the site there was a clear statement of what I was trying to achieve, a rough outline of how long the questionnaire should take to complete, as well as the opportunity to contact me through email if respondents felt that they had more to add. Pages were uniformly presented with a common colour scheme, avoiding bright colours, and I chose to use a 'sans' font throughout in order to aid those with literacy difficulties in completing their responses.

Out of all the completed surveys (545), only thirty two individuals followed up their responses with additional emails — usually to point out perceived failings in the construction of the survey, and only two offered the possibility of follow-up

interviews. There were three points of critique raised by respondents that are worthy of note. The first was the critique of the term 'ambivalent', discussed above, and the second was that, in the list of types of employment, there was no category for 'home-maker' (or equivalent), and that this was a serious omission. This is a good point, and I think a noteworthy lapse, particularly as I had adapted an industry standard list of types of employment used in on-line research.

The third critique (which was the most frequent — made seven times), was that the questionnaire was biased towards a particular point of view, namely that Pagans were likely to be 'green'. This was predicated on the inclusion of possibilities in terms of action in relation to various issues that included 'being arrested'. I repudiate this as evidence of an inherent bias, because, in fact, if one is looking at a spectrum of possible actions in relation to an issue, one should supply respondents with as full a spectrum as possible, rather than just limit it to perceived degrees of socially acceptable 'normality'. I think that it is also significant that, in every category where respondents could suggest that they had been arrested, some did so: never a large number, but always enough to suggest that the inclusion of the option was correct. This critique also raises the additional point that the survey was advertised as being about 'Pagan engagement with environmental issues', so its respondents were obviously attracted from those groups who felt a particular need to express their ideas here. I had expected to see only those respondents who were particularly engaged in environmental issues (as I anticipated that those for whom it was not an issue would be unlikely to give up the time to complete the

questionnaire), but obviously it attracted those who were quite angry about this perception as well.

Qualitative Research

My previous training and experience in conducting ethnographic research was strongly based in the phenomenological tradition. I had been taught that the purpose of the researcher was to discover what religious believers were thinking or doing through my observations, and then to interpret this in the light of a particular academic theory. In many respects such an attitude to research is part of the enlightenment project. That is to say, any phenomena may be subjected to the powers of reason through observation, and ‘understood’ — firmly based in the rational modernist ontology that I have critiqued in earlier chapters. Even within this tradition, there is a recognition that subjecting human beliefs and behaviours to empirical measurement is no simple task, and Husserl’s concept of *epoché*, or ‘bracketing out’ (Husserl 1993, 20), is an attempt to give a form of empirical, scientific rigour and objectivity to what is potentially a very messy and nebulous form of research. The idea of *epoché* is that the researcher, through developing an awareness of their own prejudices, can acknowledge them, and through that acknowledgement find ways of remaining ‘objective’ in their studies. Husserl describes such an approach thus:

If I keep purely what comes into view – for me, the one who is meditating, by virtue of my free epoché with respect to the being of the experienced world, the momentous fact is that I, with my life [my cogitations] remain

untouched by my existential status, regardless of whether or not the world exists (Husserl 1977, 19-20).

Ninian Smart explains this approach through the useful example of someone studying Nazism – where one might imaginatively consider the feelings and beliefs of members of the Nazi party, but this would “not entail that we therefore approve of the values of Hitler and his followers” (Smart 1973, 22); the scholar’s own feelings and thoughts would be ‘bracketed out’. Salomonsen (2002,17) identifies such an approach as being ‘horizontal’, in that it seeks to identify with the subject of the research, in solidarity with an indigenous point of view, in order to reflect and draw conclusions from that information.

The idea of absolute objectivity in ethnographic research has been sidelined by a combination of the rise of the importance of subjectivity in other areas of research (the ‘observer effect’ in quantum physics suggesting that subjectivity is important even in what were considered purely empirical sciences), and an awareness that, in fact, greater success in describing and interpreting the object of study may come from a more reflexive articulation. Flood critiques a purely phenomenological approach:

The objectivism of the phenomenological research programme can be brought into question from the perspective of postmodern indeterminism, and an argument presented that the understanding and/or explanation of a religion is always historically contingent; knowledge is always produced

from a social base, though this base is rendered invisible by objectivist science (Flood 1999, 9).

A more reflexive approach is one that does not seek to bracket out the researcher's position, but makes it more explicit, so that their story can be clearly seen in context — such as Wallis' *autoarchaeology* (Wallis 2003, 2). The application of phenomenological *epoché* carries with it more than a hint of cultural/intellectual imperialism in that the researcher, while relying upon the informant for the information, then takes it away from the cultural milieu and examines it in an academic milieu, subjecting it to theoretical interpretation and a (possibly inappropriate) objectification. All this is, of course, subject to the researcher clearly understanding what it is that they are seeing and hearing. Even where conventional language barriers do not exist, Wittgenstein's notion of language games may lead to misunderstandings, where the informant may be misunderstood and misinterpreted. As Northcote (2004) suggests, there are points, particularly in dealing with supernatural claims, where even the application of *epoché* does little to actually address issues of cultural bias.

Reactivity and Reflexivity

Reactivity is the effect produced on a social group by the scholar who is studying it... Reflexivity is the readiness of scholars to be openly aware of the prejudices, preoccupations, instincts, emotions and personal traits that they bring to their studies, and the ways in which these can influence the latter
(Hutton 2004, 171).

I am extremely envious of those other scholars whose work I have read, who are able to situate themselves in relation to their object of study and, through their

succinct reflexivity, neatly reveal their own approach. The growing field of Pagan studies has encouraged the development of a variety of more reflexive methodologies that allow individuals to (as Wallis puts it) “walk between the worlds” of Paganism and academia. Salomonson (2004, 49) quotes Schleiermacher that: “Anyone who has not experienced will not understand” as part of her argument for a compassionate methodology that rejects “the dishonest illusion of objectivity”. Many other contemporary Pagan scholars have taken this approach, allowing them to claim ownership of the liminal space between privileged academic outsider, and participating insider. Flood emphasises the importance of being able to understand the situation in which the researcher finds themselves: “A reflexive dialogical model that is aware of the limits of its own possibilities is inherently critical and aware of the narratives in which it is embedded” (Flood 1999, 39).

I find that my own situation is rather more complex. During the time that I have spent on this research (seven years as a part-time student) my relationship with the central questions of this work has been most effectively characterised by the Buddhist concept of *anicca* — it has been a constant flow of change. While some very general positions have remained (I would describe myself as ‘Pagan’, and indeed would have done all the way through), I have moved through a number of different understandings of what ‘being Pagan’ might mean as the work has progressed, and as my relationship to it has changed. In many respects I am much more profoundly confused as to what ‘being Pagan’ means for me now than I ever have been in the past: I no longer know exactly what I think about deity, spiritual practice, myth and story, or my wider relationship to ‘the Pagan community’. What

I do know, though, is that I'm much more relaxed about not being able to clearly articulate these things as the fact that I can move through different perspectives and learn new things through a range of different experiences is sufficient for me. I no longer feel the need to permanently occupy a particular position; I am relaxed about becoming what I describe as an *Heraclitan Paddler*. This is a reference to Heraclitus' famous saw about 'never being able to step into the same river twice', one that I would argue is particularly apposite, as Shaw (2006, 131) has already identified the constantly shifting sands of the inter-tidal zone as a suitable site for developing an ecologically inspired methodology.

Many Pagan traditions (and an increasing number of anthropologists) place a great value upon telling stories as a method of transmitting values and attitudes (although detailed hermeneutical analysis is not usually part of this for Pagans), and I think that there is considerable value in sharing a couple of the stories from my research journey, as a means of accessing or articulating my reflexivity. The first of these is to do with my own understanding of the importance of embodiment in ritual: as a researcher examining embodiment, my research must comply with Seymour's description that:

The body occupies a central position in research as in every other aspect of life. Values of trust, truth, and equity are explicitly linked with corporeality. Bodies are essential for the practical accomplishment of fieldwork: Fieldwork is an embodied activity (Seymour 2007, 1191).

Seiðr

The experience upon which I'm going to concentrate was taking part in a *seiðr* high seat ritual. *Seiðr* is explored by Blain (2002), who acknowledges that, even amongst its practitioners, it is a contested discourse, but describes it as a shamanic or oracular practice (largely of Northern Tradition Paganism) where individuals "work as community-diviners using oracular *seiðr*, 'sit out' in quest of private knowledge, work with spirits to make others 'whole' or otherwise engage with Wyrd" (Blain 2002, 59). This was a small, intense ritual at a larger, annual, private gathering of experienced initiates. A great deal of energy was raised through drumming, trance dancing and chanting: and then focussed inwards to aid the seeress in her ecstatic descent to *Helheim*, in order to gain oracular information from the gathered ancestors. This was my first experience of this type of ritual activity, although I had heard about it before. I found it both powerful and effective. The dancing certainly induced a swift change in consciousness — although as usual in my experience this was more apparent when flicking back briefly into ordinary modes of consciousness. I always find that I don't notice the transition into trance or meditative states until I crash back into ordinary modes of being. This was continued and deepened by the *vardlokur* spirit chant ("The gate is open, the time has come, the seer's work must be done"). Again, the effect of this wasn't obvious until flicking briefly back into ordinary consciousness, where I found myself sitting, swaying rapidly and intently to the rhythm, clapping hard/slapping/punching the floor, and fixating upon the first line of the chant, which I was articulating clearly, but at very great speed over and over again. When the ancestral spirits were

invited to descend down a visualised staircase to *Helheim*, in order to answer the seeress' questions, I had a very powerful visual impression of these beings passing through the ritual circle. Although I had prepared a question to ask the seeress, I did not, as I was so involved in the chanting. Not only that, but I was trying to be aware of what she was saying to other querents. The responses were varied — some gnostic (and seemingly classical oracular responses), some based upon visual clues, but mostly direct, and almost conversational — “You should do this”, “Look in this place” etc. The grounding techniques used at the end of the ritual were effective, and I found that most of the energy was dispelled quickly, and there was a swift return to a more ordinary level of consciousness, albeit slightly heightened. I went to bed, and while falling asleep had clear hypnagogic visions of a pair of hands washing in a cauldron of water in the dark. These were very clear and sharp visions accompanied by the appropriate auditory sensations (which I would describe as a very rare occurrence in itself). My interpretation at the time was that this had something to do with balancing up the fire energy that I had been working with through the previous days, having worked to build and maintain two large ritual fires, and having meditatively walked through a fire labyrinth.

The experience upon which I want to concentrate occurred the next morning. I awoke early, filled with energy (absolutely buzzing), and still to a large extent engaged with the activities of the previous night's *seiðr*. My feet were tapping, itching to dance again (which is extremely uncharacteristic) and whenever I sat down, I found myself unconsciously tapping out the rhythm of the *vardlokur*. The chant ran through my head — particularly the first line that had so interested me

the previous night. Others commented upon my evident vitality and energy. Now beyond this, I experienced a real focussing of the sensation of being embodied — which of course is very difficult to describe. However, I would describe it as a mode of consciousness (in the sense that it was noticeably different to ‘ordinary’ consciousness) including a number of uncharacteristic experiences or perceptions. These included:

- *A fascination with my own body* — I found myself sitting in the sun, staring at my toes, aware of an ascetic sense of beauty in their shape, but simultaneously aware of them as ‘representative’ of material being in general. This was accompanied by a sense of wonder that these objects of sense were at the same time part of myself. There was also a heightened sense of identification; the objects at which I was looking were not ‘different’ from my essential being — I wasn’t conscious of looking at ‘my toes’, but of looking in a much more profound way at myself which was both without and within the physical.
- *Somatic exploration* — I found that I was interacting with the world around me in a new and different way to my normal consciousness. This took place in two distinct ways: firstly, a heightened sensory awareness — touch, sight, smell all seemed so much more vital and intense; secondly, I was aware of a much greater sense of belonging to and participation within the natural world. The act of breathing, for example, was not one that I performed upon air, but one in which I participated with the air. I’ve often thought about the idea of this immersion in nature as being based upon a permeable sense of self, but had never really experienced it so directly before.

- *A sense of awe and wonder* — while it may seem hackneyed to suggest this, it was a powerful experience, but one not exclusively focussed outward. There was no inherent difference between the wonder of the sunrise, the feet, the grass around me, or the insects within the grass. They were all equally wonderful, and imbued with power and energy.

This group of sensations, which combined to form a profoundly embodied form of consciousness, persisted for the first half of the day, after which tiredness caught up with me, and as I became more tired, I was aware of a shift back towards a more conventional form of consciousness. My participation in and analysis of this event plunges me firmly into a reflexive methodology. I do not believe that I can lay claim to the traditional academic role of participant observer: I was not an observer but a full participant, experiencing the ritual as an important and powerful event, using the dance and chant to pass into trance states, and being aware of spirit presences. It was not my first experience of ritual, and this means that I am able to make informed comments about the feelings that arose afterwards. I have had plenty of other comparative experience, and have continued to explore that radical embodiment of consciousness as an after-effect of ritual work. I also believe that this goes a long way towards justifying rejection of the insider/outsider dichotomy. Bauman's categorization of the experience of the outside as "unnerving", and that "venturing "far-away" means being beyond one's ken, out of place, and out of one's element, inviting trouble and fearing harm" (Bauman 1998, 13) was clearly not the case here. Although it was a new and powerful experience, it was neither as

difficult nor challenging as my previous experience of fieldwork in a charismatic Christian church.

A second story that is important to relate is the way that I first encountered the Landmatters community, who were to form such an important part of my research. This story resonates with the significance that they attach to seemingly synchronic events. I had previously been interviewing some 'big names' on the Pagan scene for this work, but was very conscious that I needed to find a group with whom I could build a more long-term relationship in order to develop greater depth of exploration. I had wrestled with the best way to approach this, and one evening had noted that finding a group which would enable me to do this would be almost impossible. The very next day I checked my emails to discover a request forwarded through the British Reclaiming Community E-list for "Magical Energy to be put out to support the Planning Process for the Landmatters Permaculture Cooperative". The second line revealed that they were located, in fact, only a few miles away from where I lived, and they subsequently became the focus of the qualitative aspects of my research. This is the kind of combination of events which would prove to be particularly important for my informants at Landmatters; they would interpret it as the Universe aligning to enable me to carry out my research with them.

Like Mantin, I attempted to practise a methodology based upon embodiment, "which recognizes the interaction between our own lived experience and our intellectual process" (Mantin 2004, 153), but I would also highlight the significance of reciprocal relationship in the fieldwork. The nature of the relationship that is at

the heart of fieldwork (and the different kinds of relationship that are at the heart of different kinds of research) are worthy of note. I think it is important to emphasise the absolutely fundamental ordinariness or *every-day-ness* of these important relationships — as Seymour says:

The open-endedness, flexibility, and potential to reveal the unanticipated loose ends and discontinuities of everyday life are critical to a deeper understanding of social complexity (Seymour 2007, 1189).

For me, what is significant is that these are not special forms of relationship, but commonplace, normative and accessible. Flood expresses the importance of “friendship and its corollary trust”, as central to fieldwork, emphasising the “creation of bonds between the ethnographer and her informant, the creation of an atmosphere of context in which occurs the reciprocal exchange of knowledge, and a kind of immersion of the ethnographer in the fieldwork experience” (Flood 1999, 212), and Harvey talks about the importance of an approach based upon guesthood which:

entails not only recognition but celebration of academic presence among, and full participation with, our hosts (properly understood as those who might refuse us access and guesthood). Furthermore it entails conversations with, and learning from, knowledgeable hosts, and some explicit form of reciprocation that benefits those hosts (Harvey 2005, xvi).

I found that my most profound immersion in this guesthood approach arose in my relationship with the Landmatters community. The classic ethnographic pattern of

identifying a gatekeeper here was not so important as the community is tightly knit, and firmly based in a tradition of decision making by consensus. Here I had to build relationships over a period of time, and although my role shifted, I was perceived as being *lan*, even though I passed through a number of roles — volunteer, researcher, visitor, interviewer, ritual participant, workshop attendee, and even visiting school-teacher in my visits. All of these, of course, are predicated to a greater or lesser degree upon guesthood, but the relationship between *lan* and the community never really underwent a substantial shift; it remained a relationship centred upon a literally embodied host/guest identity, all the other identities being like beads strung on that common thread of reciprocity. I know that my proposal to do research there was discussed at great length in a number of community meetings, and agreed upon by consensus, rather than by majority vote — which was very affirming when first stepping into the researcher role. I describe the guesthood as literally embodied because, to use Bauman's terms, it did involve "going far away" — a visit to Landmatters (all of which took place while I was working full time) involved considerable planning, implied transport challenges, and because none of my visits were for a long time (none longer than a week), there was a strong sense of stepping out of one reality into another, quite distinct one.⁵

During the time that I conducted my research at Landmatters, I really only conducted interviews on 2 out of the 20 or so visits. Here I would meet with individuals at pre-arranged times, and make recordings of very loosely structured

⁵ Visitors' cars are not welcome at the site, although I was accorded the generous concession of being able to visit by motorcycle.

interviews. In all cases I asked very few questions, usually just starting off by asking interviewees to talk about their 'back-story' — how they had come to live in the community — and then picking up on points that they made (often about 'relationship to the land') that I would like them to elucidate further. While these questions were often similar, I didn't really have a 'standard list', which would, I felt, have sought (in Kirk and Miller's term) "quixotic reliability at the expense of validity" (Kirk and Miller 1986, 54). My relationships with, and prior knowledge of, the respondents, frequently altered the exact approach that was used. Most of these interviews lasted about an hour, and would very rarely involve my asking more than three or four direct questions. In addition to these I also maintained field notes, even on visits when I was not doing interviews. These would be written up as a reflection at the end of each day, or recorded sooner if of particular interest (exact wording of spontaneous blessings etc).

Reactivity

I have been aware that during the course of this project the whole business of ethics within Paganism was being considered much more fully by members of the broader Pagan community — but I suggest that this is a product of a wider zeitgeist than anything arising from the effects of this research. One of the most significant contributions to the whole debate was made by Emma Restall Orr, with the 2007 publication of 'Living with Honour' (subtitled 'A Pagan Ethics'). I had spent a wonderful day with Emma early on in the course of this research, and we had discussed a wide range of different ideas that might inform Pagan Ethics. I was startled (and honoured) when I saw that some of the thinkers and books that I had

suggested to her appeared in some chapters of this new work, thus, even while I had tried to keep this work hermetically sealed off from the wider community, I could see that the embodied principle of reciprocal relationship would inevitably lead to this work having some kind of broader effect.

There is a limited extent to which it is possible to gauge any effect upon the individuals who completed the questionnaire (there was definitely some robust discussion on one or two webpages), but it was possible to judge, in some cases, through their own reflections upon it, the effect upon some members of the Landmatters community. The most significant thing for many was the way in which it gave them the opportunity to reflect upon the whole question of their identity.

Emma said:

I suppose that it has made me think as well about Paganism, which I had never really thought about. Paganism was always some strange thing that people did under moonlight with knives and goats! It definitely wasn't me! So that was nice, to kind of feel a sense of identity, although I'm still a bit... I don't know that I would call myself a Pagan! Although I suppose that it does need reclaiming! Surely if you are a Pagan then you love the earth! (Emma 2008).

Even Ollie, probably the most robustly 'non-Pagan' of the whole community (and the swiftest, most voluble rejecter of a 'Pagan' identity) conceded that: "Those sorts of ceremonies and rituals, if they help people to feel a part of this place and connect to it in some way, well that's good" (Ollie 2008).

Embodied Relationship

I suppose that there is a degree to which the methodology of any research project can be considered as a relationship and while the expectations that one might have upon entering a relationship may hold true for much of the time, a degree of reflexivity and flexibility is vital here, too. The pursuit of the goal of the project, establishing the veracity of the thesis, requires an approach based upon Levinas's idea of the 'caress', as grasping tightly to any methodology will inevitably transform that flowing caress, that reflects an honouring and reciprocal relationship, into an assault, a manifestation of 'power-over', which is inevitably distorting, dishonouring, and destructive. I hope that I have been able to demonstrate such a light-touch approach in my research, and thus fully honoured the voices of those who shared their stories with me.

6.

Paganism

It is a 'truth universally acknowledged' that there is a special relationship with nature inherent in contemporary Paganism. A simple search of introductory literature and websites finds that Paganism is constantly portrayed as a 'nature religion' or a religion where 'nature is worshipped'.⁶ It is taken for granted by many within the tradition that this is the case. Amergin Og, a past president of the Pagan Federation, stated that: "Pagans have a special relationship with the environment".⁷ This attitude is also found amongst the academics who study Paganism. Harvey summarises the attitudes of many academics when he states that

The root, trunk, branch of the matter is that whatever else Pagans do, and however 'Green' other people might be, Paganism is a religion centrally concerned with celebrating Nature. Pagans are people who are listening to the speaking earth (Harvey 1997, 16).

Similarly Greenwood comments that: "Contemporary self-designating Pagans use the term broadly as 'One who honours nature'" (Greenwood 2000, 4), an understanding that is broadened by Berger's assertion that: "The underlying link for Neo-Pagans among these divergent religions is their reverence for nature. Not surprisingly the worship of nature is central to Neo-Paganism" (Berger 1999, 16). This is echoed by Hardman: "Paganism or neo-Paganism is... a religion based on Nature worship and ancient indigenous traditions" (Hardman 2000, ix). Such an

⁶ In a random examination of the first 100 sites that came up on Google, 83 used this designation as an important part of their explanation of Paganism.

⁷ Talk at the Devon and Cornwall Pagan Federation Conference, 2005.

attitude is summed up in the fact that one of the first academic publications on contemporary Paganism in the UK was entitled *Nature Religion Today*. This consensus of attitudes, from both within and without the tradition(s) (and, of course, in the liminal space between, as a great many academics studying Paganism are both Pagans and academics) combine to form what seems to be an unshakeable discourse of Paganism as a broad tradition that is focussed upon a unique and centralised relationship with nature.

Another academic approach to this has been to turn it on its head. Instead of defining Paganism as a nature religion, York achieves what seems to be a more satisfactory synthesis by suggesting that the kinds of religious behaviours that are focussed within nature (as opposed to those focussed on a 'transcendent super-nature') are all correctly identified as Pagan, "cultic behaviour that is directed inside nature is Pagan" (York 2003, 67). This is also evident on the website of *The Pomegranate* (the academic journal of Pagan studies) which describes one of its main areas of interest as traditions having an "emphasis on nature as a source of sacred value" (Clifton n.d.). This, of course, means that a large amount of religious behaviour which might not traditionally be thought of as Pagan (Hinduism is particularly obvious in York's analysis) falls into the category of Paganism, even with this definition. However, the relationship between Paganism and nature is paramount.

Paganism or Paganisms?

This concept is not without its problems, however, and probably the first and greatest of those is the whole concept of Paganism(s). I know from my own experience teaching religious studies in secondary schools, that people tend to want to be able to fit new ideas into convenient pigeonholes in their mental schema — indeed neuroscience tells us that memory storage is arranged by similarity, thus we tend to concentrate upon ways in which the thing that we are investigating, is like the things with which we are familiar. The whole construction of the concept of Paganism is a good example of how this approach fails in practice. When studying religions we tend to look for those things that our culture identifies as ‘religious’ (dogma, texts, buildings, trained priesthood etc) which means that we may often misidentify the phenomenon that is actually there, or indeed miss the phenomena that are important because we do not recognise them as being ‘religious’. When talking about Paganism, in Hardman’s words, as ‘a religion’, we are committing our first grotesque misrepresentation. Firstly, a new analogy needs to be developed when thinking about Paganism, and I would like to use one that I have used to describe similar problems when teaching about Hinduism:

Imagine that you are walking on a summer’s evening — it is nearly sunset, and the light is clear and the day warm. Ahead of you, you can see a cloud of flies rising from the ground. From where you stand, a long way off, the cloud appears to be ‘something’ — a single thing. You can’t see any individuals within it, only the overall shape, which although constantly changing and shifting, remains fairly coherent. You can see that there is a

clear outline to it. As you walk towards this, the impression that there is 'something' there leaves you, and as you walk into the cloud you realise that it is composed of thousands of individuals, all flying in different directions, all doing their own thing. There is not 'one thing' — there are millions of different things, yet from a distance the impression of order and coherence is quite striking (Jamison 2006, 2).

What this amounts to is that really we should be talking about Paganisms — a plurality of different world-views and life-ways. These are not necessarily delimited by the 'normative' traditions of Paganism — different traditions of Wicca, Druidry or Shamanism, but more representative of individuals and small groups, for, as Carpenter points out, creativity is a key hallmark of Paganism:

Orion found Pagans to be creative individuals and the movement to be one that fostered the acquisition and use of creativity, and concluded that the core quality characterizing all approaches in Paganism is creativity. Consistent with these viewpoints, my observations have led me to the conclusion that many Pagans are involved in such spiritual paths because of the creative freedom to pick and choose various viewpoints, beliefs and practices and to integrate them into a spiritual system that meets the needs of those involved (Carpenter 1996, 49).

Although Carpenter was aware of the inherent difficulties arising from trying to describe this 'creative' approach, he still identified six "spiritual contours of the Pagan worldview" (Carpenter 1996, 50), which in many respects is a useful guide to

some attitudes that may be common amongst many Pagans: interconnectedness, immanence and transcendence, animism and spiritism, monotheism and polytheism, magic, and cyclicity.

There is what might be described as a downside to this creativity, in that there is a strong anti-authoritarian streak in Paganism. While this is obviously true in the sense that Pagans “work to create new self-images that separate them from their neighbours” (Pike 2001, 126), this has, in many cases, resulted in a constant process of re-inventing of different traditions, and a celebration of an eclectic approach. As Lassander points out:

The high emphasis on uniqueness found for all Pagan sub-groups may be seen as an indication that differences between individuals are not only tolerated, but also expected. This means that it has been necessary for the individuals to learn to accommodate many traditions and cosmologies, and not to impose one’s own views and values on others (Lassander 2009, 92).

I have sometimes heard this tendency compared to the perpetually schismatic Judean People’s Front in Monty Python’s *Life of Brian*, as the difference between some traditions may seem, to the outsider, to be negligible. This tendency to resist authority is notably manifested in the adage that ‘organising Pagans is like herding cats’. Such a commonly encountered position is unsurprising: anyone who is going to publicly self-identify as Pagan (not a terribly mainstream thing to do anywhere), is obviously going to have strongly held individual opinions, and will often be keen to reject, or may even define themselves by rejecting, more normative discourses.

An increasingly popular counter-argument to this, at least among academics, is that, in fact, this perception that there are 'many different Paganisms' is misleading. Some have suggested that there is a 'wicca-lite hegemony' which means that the majority of Pagan practice is, in fact, very influenced by the traditions and forms of Wicca (both through the influence of initiated Wiccans, who may increasingly be seen as a sort of priesthood or members of a religious order by non-initiated Pagans, and through the sheer ubiquity of Wiccan ideas in popular Pagan books). This is not to say that a wide diversity of practice does not exist, but rather that, a lot of that practice derives from, or is influenced by that of Wicca. Pearson suggests that "Wicca is the classical form from which all other contemporary Pagan groups evolved" (Pearson 2007, 4).⁸ A similar view is expressed by Rees:

Wicca can be seen as a 'common core Paganism' very similar to Michael Harner's idea of common core shamanism. From this point of view it is primarily a methodology, a set of (largely ritual) techniques to change consciousness, access the sacred and influence things (magic, healing) (Rees 2007).

While such a viewpoint might raise the hackles of many Pagans, it is not totally unreasonable, as similar views are reported by Australian academics:

I mean in Australia what is termed 'Paganism', what one might participate in at a public Pagan event held here, is usually designed following Wiccan format for its rituals. For example, say, the Church of All Worlds here, it is

⁸ Actually she attributes this to Hutton, but following up the reference, I do not see this implication in his original.

not a Wiccan system, but its rituals usually are structured in a Wiccan format. This format is thought to be the 'way' Paganism was/is. A Wiccan (or I should really say a Ceremonial Magic format of the 4 Elements, pentagrams - i.e./ the Lesser Banishing Rituals of the Pentagram and deity in the centre) is thought to be the way ancient, authentic 'Paganism' was/is performed....I am saying that what is thought to be 'Paganism' here - in many events I have attended - is inspired by Wiccan texts, as in sources for learning how to construct rituals because of a lack of knowledge about other sorts of Pagan religions. And because Wiccan texts such as, for example books by Janet and Stewart Farrar are so easy to find. Not everybody does this, but most do. In my experience, what is termed 'Paganism' here is Wicca without belonging to a Gardnerian or Alexandrian lineage (Tully 2007).

This is further complicated by the fact that it may be argued that Wicca is, in fact, not terribly Pagan (in the nature-venerating sense), as it is an initiatory tradition strongly influenced by the mystery traditions of the Western Esoteric tradition. Thus many Wiccans do, in fact, practise a transcendental religion, one that is focussed upon 'higher spiritual truths', and while the divine may be understood symbolically as representing nature, the fact that it is symbolic represents a clear demarcation between what York might describe as Paganism and transcendentalism. Hutton (1999) has demonstrated that the intellectual roots of Wicca lie in the European esoteric/hermetic occult tradition, and romanticism, and Pearson (2007) has suggested that Wicca also owes a great debt to the unorthodox

Christian churches of the 19th century. Hanegraaff sums this approach up when he writes that “[Wicca is] a neo-Pagan development of traditional occultist ritual magic, but the ... movement is not itself Pagan” (Hanegraaff 1998, 86).

The lack of dogma encountered in Paganism is also a factor that arises from this creativity. “One of the many characteristics that so clearly distinguishes Paganism from the revealed religions is the lack of necessity to believe blindly in anything at all” (Restall Orr 2007, 9). This means that amongst a given group of Pagans, even amongst a particular tight-knit group working on a ritual together, there can be a diversity of understandings, or world-views. It is perfectly possible for a Wiccan coven (that is a specific group within one tradition of Paganism, who might be expected to share a common outlook that might not be shared with other Pagans) to perform meaningful and significant rituals while holding what might seem to be mutually contradictory understandings of what is actually happening. Within that group one may find Wiccans who have an absolute faith in the real existence of one Supreme Goddess, others who believe in a large number of Goddesses, others who see those Goddesses as aspects of their psyche, or indeed as what Lamond refers to as ‘poetic metaphors’:

We have embraced the rich pantheons of the European pre-Christian religions, and — at times — of contemporary Hinduism and African religions, not as beliefs, but as poetic descriptions of our relationship to our living environment (Lamond 1997, ix).

Indeed Lamond’s book is proudly entitled *Religion without beliefs*.

So if dogma is not going to be a unifying force within Paganism, perhaps praxis might do instead? York privileges Adler's suggestion that:

it is the doing of Paganism — the performance of rituals, the celebration of festivals, the commensurate geocentric activities — that is important, and not necessarily the affirmation of supernatural reality (York 2003, 143).

Here he is not suggesting that there is going to be any necessarily shared practice, but rather that practice itself, action in the world is what is important. As Harvey states:

Embodied reality is authoritative in Paganism because it is the location in which people explore 'reality'... Its chief sources of authority are in nature; the observable cycles of the planet, and the experienced cycles of the body. Paganism is formed by Pagans observing and experiencing these things, and then evolving forms in which they can be celebrated (Harvey 1997, 187).

Now this may mean that as some of those cycles are universal, they may be celebrated universally by Pagans (the classic festivals of the 'wheel of the year' being a good example), but without necessarily a shared understanding of the methods or mythologizing that often accompanies such ritual performance in other traditions.

One of the ways that academics have traditionally dealt with these difficulties is by accepting Paganism as a self-designation — i.e. if someone says 'I am a Pagan', then they are. One positive outcome of this approach has been to encourage the acceptance of a wide, albeit nebulous understanding of Paganism by academics,

which, while making talking about Paganism very difficult, certainly more accurately reflects the lived experience of Pagans. One significant factor here is the so-called 'coming home' experience reported by many Pagans (who usually eschew discourse of 'conversion'). This is articulated by Ezzy:

As a consequence, Paganism feels like 'home' when we find it because it is an integrated framework of thought and practice that incorporates a variety of more general ideas that we have already come to accept. Put another way, Pagans convert backwards. More general cultural trends and a variety of experiences socialise us into a set of ideas about the way things 'should be'. We then go searching for, or stumble across, a group or tradition that shares them (Ezzy 2006 a).

The flip side of this identification is the existence of those people who don't think of themselves as Pagan (or indeed who reject the term due to negative views of others who self-identify as Pagan). Harris raises this issue in relation to fieldwork:

I ... have had to carefully consider the question of when it's accurate to count someone as a 'Pagan'. Several respondents in my current research into Eco-Paganism question whether they are 'Pagan', usually because they want to differentiate their practice and beliefs from that of other people who identify as Pagan. The thinking is: 'If *they* are practising Paganism, then *I'm* not a Pagan'. But by almost any of the common definitions of the name they unquestionably are 'Pagan'. There is also the interesting situation where someone has what we would - I think - agree are

Pagan beliefs and practices, but are unaware of the name. I'm sure we've all heard the story - or even lived it - about someone realising that what they've believed and/or practised for years is called 'Paganism' (Harris 2007, *my italics*).

Returning to the specific topic though, these diverse viewpoints make it very difficult to pin down exactly what Paganism is, and this compounds the difficulty in determining to what extent these identities are, in fact, intimately connected to ideas about nature. Bowman initiates the critical question when she asks:

But what is actually meant by 'nature' in Paganism, and to what extent is Pagan identity defined in relation to 'nature'? ...In a tradition which stresses the importance of personal responsibility, what happens when some Pagans behave towards 'nature' in a way that others regard as irresponsible? (Bowman 2000).

This is a profound question which is echoed in Clifton's comments that:

Since my first involvement with NeoPagan Witchcraft in the mid 1970s, I have been told that ours is a religion of nature... In fact contemporary Witches and other Pagans have tossed the term 'nature' around for years without seriously examining what it means to them or reflecting on its history (Clifton 2004, 336).

As I have worked on this research I have come across two quite separate and distinct viewpoints, and while both of them may seek to situate Paganism as an identity in relation to nature, their approaches and implications seem radically

opposed. Many scholars have recognised this duality within Paganism, but have tended to portray this dichotomy in strictly oppositional terms — situating individuals either as *this* kind of Pagan or as *that* kind of Pagan. Indeed, as York states:

The empirical and the metaphorical or imaginal are two separate but inter-related realms of being. The Pagan often understands the metaphorical as an independent ontology along with the observable: the latter perhaps as the *natura naturata*; the former as the *natura naturans*. In general, these may be approached as unconnected — with some people concentrating on the one, some on the other (York 2010 , 76).

I suggest, however, that what we find in contemporary Paganism is almost always a blend of these two discourses: it is important to note that they are both present in most forms of Paganism, and only exist in their ‘pure and unalloyed’ form in very few manifestations of Paganism. In both cases they originate in the historical forces that allowed the formation of contemporary Paganisms, and are thus deeply rooted in both emic and etic understandings of Paganism. Neither of these discourses is static, but both have developed and changed as Paganism has developed, and indeed continue to change as Paganism itself grows and changes in the contemporary world.

Esoteric Discourse of nature

The first of these two discourses I describe as the ‘esoteric’ discourse of nature. This is based in the western esoteric tradition, which has informed the development of

contemporary Paganism in so many different ways — both through ritual praxis, and the theoretical approaches that underlie it. In this discourse, nature is understood as being of prime importance, but nature is understood as being important primarily for its symbolic value, rather than as nature *qua* nature. Both Faivre and Voss and Hanegraaff have examined the development of this tradition, and explain how the key ideas that were initially articulated by Renaissance *magi* were adapted by the occultist esotericists of the nineteenth century to develop a range of esoteric practices and beliefs that are still in use today, and which have had an enormous impact upon the development of Paganism. There is also considerable gnostic influence here. It is gnostic in that, through the acquisition of experiential knowledge (γνῶσις), spiritual reality may be attained and physical reality overcome, transformed and left behind through spiritual illumination. It is clear throughout this discourse that, as Hanegraaff states: “the Platonic perspective assumes the world of ideas to be ontologically more real than the earthly one” (Hanegraaff 2003, 367). The most important realities, indeed the only truly real realities, are spiritual ones, not the direct un-meditated encounter with nature.

Faivre and Voss identify six key areas that identify esoteric thought, which are of great value in understanding the ways in which this influences the development of this particular discourse of nature in Paganism. The first of these is ‘correspondences’. This is the idea that, as everything may be linked to everything else, the entire universe is conjoined, and that spiritual realities may be appreciated, accessed, and manipulated through symbolism. The significance of correspondences for the Magician is obvious in works like Crowley’s *Liber 777*,

which is simply an enormous compendium of lists of correspondences; it links Hebrew letters and divine names, Qabalistic symbols, tarot trumps, paths on the Tree of Life, elements, planets, Egyptian gods, various colour scales, Scandinavian gods, Hindu gods, Buddhist meditations, precious stones, animals, plants, figures from Christianity, Roman gods, Taoism, magical powers, perfumes, weapons, the Greek alphabet, djinni, alchemical elements, archangels, demons, choirs of angels, the Buddhist eightfold path, metals, planetary spirits, chakras, legendary orders of being and the human body (amongst others) (Regardie 1973). The significance of this approach is that everything in nature is only important inasmuch as it is related to everything else, and thus to the ontologically more real spiritual realities. Faivre and Voss comment that this means: "The entire universe is, as it were, an enormous theatre of mirrors, an ensemble of hieroglyphs to be decoded" (Faivre and Voss 1995, 60), an explanation which implies that the importance of nature lies not in nature itself, but in what may be 'decoded' from nature — that the ultimate reality of things is a mystery that has to be extrapolated from the symbols that exist in the world. The importance of such a world view to contemporary Paganism is quickly apparent, not merely in many contemporary publications that carry on the 'project of correspondences', but also in the importance of a symbolic perception of nature in praxis. A good example here is the traditional association of elements with the cardinal directions in (Wiccan and other Pagan) ritual. Within Wicca, the element air is understood to be situated in the east, fire in the south, water in the west, and earth in the north. Each of these elements is understood to represent and include a huge body of associated ideas, for which the elements are essentially

symbols designed to remind the properly prepared initiate. The primacy for many Pagans of this symbolic understanding of nature may be seen when Wiccans invoke these traditional and symbolic elements in situations where they seem in direct opposition to the physical reality of the situation — i.e. in a ritual on a south-facing shore, where, although the sea itself lies to the south, water is still invoked in the west, and fire in the south.

The second of Faivre and Voss's 'methodological propositions' is that of 'Living Nature', which initially seems to link this tradition with a more embodied practice. However, Faivre and Voss's description of this nature as "essentially alive in all its parts, often inhabited by a light or hidden fire circulating through it" (Faivre and Voss 1995, 60) is telling. The understanding of this 'light or hidden fire' is significant, suggesting that the life of nature is in fact the ultimate spiritual reality underlying appearances of difference. Both Faivre and Voss, and Hanegraaff are at pains to point out that such an understanding has its origins in the Renaissance understanding of the creation, where the divine spirit of God permeates and fills creation. In more recent occult understandings, however, this is now understood in more general terms as 'spirit'. What is important here is precisely that 'light or hidden fire'. Nature is only important as it contains and conceals this ultimate reality. Faivre and Voss use this as the key for understanding the nature of magic, which they describe as "simultaneously the knowledge of networks of sympathies and antipathies which link the things of nature together as well as the concrete operations informed by that knowledge" (Faivre and Voss 1995, 60). This is not, however, 'sympathetic magic' or 'low magic', designed to bring about changes

within the physical world, but a much more 'elevated and occult' understanding that emphasizes magical praxis as fundamentally engaged with spiritual transformation, gnosis and liberation. As Hanegraaff describes them, these techniques are "actually psychological techniques intended to develop a mystical consciousness" (Hanegraaff 2003, 366).

This idea of transformation is made explicit in Faivre and Voss's fourth category, 'Transmutation', which they describe explicitly as a metamorphosis (from the mundane physical into the spiritual), the end that is to be desired by the esotericist. For Faivre and Voss this is accomplished by:

a cooperation between knowledge (in the sense of gnosis), and active imagination in order for lead to be changed into silver and silver into gold. The 'gnosis' often referred to in modern Western esoteric currents is the kind of illuminated knowledge which results in a state of being conducive to the 'second birth' (Faivre and Voss 1995, 61).

This use of alchemical imagery demonstrates once again the importance of the symbolic approach in this school of thought (alchemy being frequently understood as a spiritual practice carefully concealed by elaborate symbolism). The next two categories identified by Faivre and Voss are really only of peripheral interest to this discussion, but are of some relevance, in that they demonstrate the influence of this tradition upon contemporary Paganisms. They are the 'Praxis of Concordance', which they identify as the tendency to view all new material and ideas coming from different cultures as 'part of the same thing'. Thus the esoteric tradition easily

consumes ideas arriving from other cultures, and re-interprets them away from their traditional *Sitz im Leben* ('setting in life' or context) in accordance with the tradition's priorities. They identify this as occurring within both the idea of the perennial philosophy (a concept that all religions are basically teaching the same thing), as well as within the academic field of comparative religion, and the voracious and omnivorous New Age. This is also something that is true for Paganism. It is quite happy to absorb ideas from other cultures, frequently wresting them out of their original situations, to re-interpret them in accordance with the priorities of Paganism, thus one may find Hindu Pagans, Daoist Pagans, and even Christian Wiccans in a short web search. The final idea is that of 'transmission', the importance of an initiatory lineage, which remains extremely significant within some forms of Wicca, notably those identified as 'BTW' (British Traditional Witchcraft), a description of Gardnerian and Alexandrian covens, usually applied in the USA.

The significance of this tradition of thought for contemporary Paganism is readily apparent. If one takes the tradition of Wicca, the features that Faivre and Voss identify can all be seen to be present — and most importantly, those which are to do with a symbolic understanding of nature are central. Wicca uses a wide (and sometimes eclectic) system of correspondences to carry out spiritual practices, and is based upon a profoundly gnostic world view. The understanding of nature in Wicca is usually in line with the esoteric understanding outlined by Faivre and Voss — although worshipped in Wicca it is usually present in the form of the duotheistic deities; the universe is deified as the Goddess, and the waxing and waning life of

the natural world is deified as the Horned God. A good example of the symbolic demarcation of nature is the anecdote about a coven which met in a specially decorated attic of a suburban house, where photographic wallpaper portraying a forest grove covered the walls, and taped birdsong was played (Harris 2005). The idea of 'transmutation' is also very obvious in Wiccan praxis and writings, notably those of Vivienne Crowley, who applies a Jungian reading to her explanation of Wicca as a pathway to individuation. As we have seen above, many academics also express this view. Greenwood expresses it very clearly when she states:

It is my view that modern witchcraft is less a nature religion in its own right than a development of high magic, which in its later years, since the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, has developed as a result of inner rather than external nature, the focus being on personal spiritual transformation and growth in association with the natural world, rather than the worship of 'nature' as such (Greenwood 1998, 102).

There are some obvious implications for environmental ethics in such an esoteric viewpoint that privileges an unseen spiritual reality above the physical. The accusations of wilful despoilment levelled against Christian dominion theology that one encounters are not necessarily appropriate for this tradition however. Pagans who are more influenced by the esoteric understanding of nature will still apply considerable importance to it, but they are less likely to get involved in activism, or to see any engagement with environmental issues as a part of their spirituality. They may, in fact, repudiate the idea that 'Paganism is green'. Such attitudes were

found in responses to and on-line discussions of my survey. In a discussion on the Pentacle Website, 'Taran' stated:

Certainly some Pagans do consider the environment to be central to their beliefs, but not all by any means. I think that Amergin Og needs to realise that Pagans are not some vast army of tree huggers and bunny lovers before making such sweeping statements. It gets right up my nose when the assumption is made that 'He is Pagan, therefore he must also be an environmentalist' ("Taran" 2007).

This point was also reinforced by a comment by 'carebeararmy' who critiqued the questionnaire's structure:

the questions seemed to assume we were all eco-warriors. I know a lot of Pagans are, but that's like saying all Jews walk around with a skull cap, and all Christians go to church on Sundays. I must admit, im not eco friendly at all, and although i feel strongly about the planet, i will not change the way i live until china and india stop building 3 coal powered power stations a week ("Carebeararmy" 2007).

Another contributor to online discussion of this topic, John MacIntyre (past President of the Pagan Federation), did suggest that this repudiation of environmentalism might be missing the point:

In the last few years, there has been a kind of reaction against the concept of nature-worship by a few Pagans, who have sought to present it as some sort of weak-minded, sniff the flowers and hug the bunnies, hippy fantasy.

This really seems to be picking fights for the sake of it, as it depends on twisting nature-worship into a parody few nature-worshippers would recognise (MacIntyre 2008).

The strongest argument for the lack of engagement through the esoteric viewpoint is, like Holmes' 'dog in the night-time,' the fact that such engagement is simply not present. It is absent from the majority of published works, and the discourse of many Pagans, who may be as uninspired by environmental engagement, even at the lowest level, as non-Pagans. We may also learn from Smith's insight that:

ethical paradigms entail the systematization and institutionalization of procedures of deferral and distantiation, that is, deference to authoritative bodies whose objectivity is supposedly guaranteed and validated by their very distance from and nonparticipation in, the activity concerned (Smith 2001, 156).

For Paganism, though, it may be the reverse that is true. The common Pagan approach of 'hyper-individuality' leading to a rejection of 'deference to authoritative bodies,' may well be a driver of the rejection of the ethical paradigm. Of course, it is also true that all the 'normal' reasons of apathy and disinterest that prevent others becoming engaged with environmental concerns may also apply; the comment made at a Pagan Moot I attended that 'recycling was a bore' seems to sum this attitude up quite well.

Animist Discourse of nature

The second of the two broad discourses of nature in contemporary Paganism might be described as animist, as its current expression is most firmly situated in the kind of understandings that have emerged from that perspective in recent decades. I would suggest, however, that the roots of this perspective lie deep within the Romantic movement, and have, in fact, only acquired an animist spin within recent decades. The Romantic vision is one that comes from the encounter between the individual and nature *qua* nature (nature as it stands 'out there') and thus in opposition to the idea of 'nature as symbolic representation of underlying spiritual reality' that we explored in the esoteric discourse above. The centrality of the physical, of the material, to the Romantic vision is described by Oerlemans, who suggests (when discussing Keats' 'Epistle to J.H. Reynolds') that:

The desire that Keats expresses here is for the actuality of the physical world, its facticity and material presence, as contrasted to the artificiality of art reflected by both the dreamlike state the poem begins by celebrating and the poet's initial inspiration from explicitly fanciful paintings by Titian and Claude. The material sublime is an effect, not of representation or of an act of the mind itself, but of the presence of the somatic (Oerlemans 2004, 4).

Oerlemans explicitly locates the source of the Romantic vision in the encounter between the poet and the 'real world', and explicitly denies the intellectual or artistic as sources of possible inspiration. Of course, as Hutton has pointed out, the

Romantics were frequently enthusiastic proponents of a Pagan vision too. Once again discussing Keats he suggests that “the arts, the natural world and the classical deities were all closely interwoven. Nature was the realm of the old religion” (Hutton 1999, 24). That this vision of nature (*qua* nature), sometimes understood as filled with deities (in contrast to representing symbolically a singular deity), has influenced the development of contemporary Pagan practice, is certain.

The encounter with nature *qua* nature was considerably altered in British Paganism in the 1980s to become what Harvey identifies as an animist approach to nature. There were various important factors at work in this transformation. Firstly, the influence of American Pagan thinking, notably through the writings of Starhawk, founder of the Reclaiming Tradition of Witchcraft, who sought to combine her spiritual practice with a holistic, earth-centred approach, giving birth to an attitude that embraced environmental direct action. Salomonsen describes Starhawk’s position thus: “She regards ‘connection versus separation’ as a basic ontological and psychological theme dramatized in ritual” (Salomonsen 2002, 158). This idea of reconnection with the somatic reality of nature, rather than an idealised, symbolic, nature began to percolate through British Paganism at the same time as the British Road Protest movement began to gather pace. As Letcher points out:

Not only did Starhawk succeed in motivating British Pagans to become more politically active, she also provided a set of techniques by which magic could be used as a campaigning tool (Letcher 2004, 182).

As numerous natural sites were under threat of destruction from a national road building programme, a number of protest camps sprung up to oppose this programme through direct action, and a form of Paganism became an important part of the discourse and identity of those living in the protest camps. This Pagan view was not based in an esoteric understanding of nature, but instead was rooted in the encounter with nature experienced directly by those in the protest camps, living out in the field. This was often understood as a profoundly Pagan experience. As Letcher notes:

Deciding to live in a protest camp is a Pagan act in itself. One leaves the cosseted protection of the home to live in the woods where all water must be carried from the nearest source, where there is no central heating or electricity, where all cooking is done on an open fire, where one is acutely aware of one's environment, the mud, the rain, the weather, the use and misuse of resources, where one may have to hoist oneself 80ft up a tree in order to go to bed. The campaigners at Newbury braved one of the coldest winters on record. The very act of living out, however dependent on wider society for food and so on, puts one in touch with nature in a way that is real, not virtual (Letcher 2000).

This somatic encounter with nature led to new ways of understanding Paganism, that were often perceived as *more* real than other, more formal (and esoteric) ideas:

One practitioner, an initiated witch, informed me that he had learned all of his 'craft' from the ash tree in which he lived at the Jesmond Dene protest, rather than from his more orthodox Wiccan training, indeed, the tree had taught him its name, 'Melea' (Letcher 2003, 71).

Influential in the development of this animist discourse of Paganism was the Dragon Environmental Network, whose founder, Adrian Harris, articulates an important point when he says:

I believe it's time to ask awkward questions of our Western tradition and to ground our magic elsewhere: Truly radical magic must be rooted in a more ancient earth...What remains at the core is what works: Eco-magic that co-operates with local spirits; minimal hierarchy and simple intuitive ritual that is inclusive and accessible (Harris 2000a).

This call for the abandonment of the esoteric western tradition is accompanied by an articulation of another important aspect of this animist viewpoint — an attempt to root Paganism firmly within the land in which it is practised, to re-indigenize Paganism within a land that is appreciated through direct, unmediated, somatic encounter. The animist perspective of nature is in many cases set at odds with the esoteric as the difference between attitudes is clear — nature is either a symbolic thing that points one towards underlying spiritual reality, or a somatic experience of what is 'right here, right now'.

Another important set of ideas contributing to this viewpoint are changing understandings of the nature of shamanic practice in contemporary Paganisms.

While shamanism may often be portrayed as a global phenomenon, with universal techniques (a concept originating in the work of Eliade (1989), and popularized through the 'Core Shamanism' of Harner (1992)) it may also be understood as radically and essentially situated. For some practitioners, the encounter with the spiritual other in their shamanism drives them more deeply into a somatic understanding of nature. This is well articulated by MacLellan:

I wonder at the amount of language of our ceremonies that speaks of crossing distance. We 'draw down the Moon', invoke the Directions, invite the Presences of This or That or The Next Thing to join us. Maybe the Living Goddess is already here, and do we really think that the Powers of the Four Directions are waiting for us to speak? Are they not always sweeping across the land in pulsing tides? Maybe the words of our rituals should turn inwards and call the change within us that opens our senses to the eternal presence of the Old Stone Woman, to the tide of the West moving across our little circle? The sharp answer is that "Of course, that is what our invocations really mean, and all that 'reaching out' language is, you know, metaphysical". Or is it metaphorical? (MacLellan 2004b, 367).

MacLellan is here pointing out his perception that, for the animist, indigenized practitioner, the spirits of nature are not 'out there', but already present in the lived reality. This tension within Pagan practices between the esoteric and the animist is also discussed by Harvey, who points out that the esoteric approach is:

in tension with more 'realist' understandings which lead people to think that the elements are more appropriately requested and invited to participate. Some Pagans even argue that the elements can only be thanked for their presence which must always precede the arrival of humans or the commencement of a ritual. It would be inappropriate to command or invite air, for example, to come and join in since air must already be present. Such tensions (though rarely articulated) evince an underlying stress between these different ways of understanding and treating the world (Harvey 2008, 398).

It is obvious that there is a considerable impact on environmental ethical stances in this discourse of Paganism. Indeed, it has largely been born out of individuals taking such stances. Clifton laments the lack of engagement with somatic nature amongst many Pagans in the US when he says:

I meet many followers of 'earth religion' who have no idea of the source of their drinking water, and no knowledge of the history of the land where they live — either its human history or its wild, nonhuman history. Would not there be a connection between the symbolic element of water and the water that we drink? Shouldn't people who name themselves after hawks and wolves and bears at least look one of those animals in the eye outside of a zoo? (Clifton 2004, 337).

This statement explicitly critiques those whose understanding of water is limited to the symbolic, and whose encounter with other beings is limited to imaginative

practice — suggesting that what Paganism should really be about is engagement with the lived, somatic reality. Probably the most explicit challenge to the Esoteric viewpoint, though, is articulated by Letcher when he states that: “If Paganism as a movement is not at the vanguard of environmentalism then surely it can be labeled as a ‘virtual religion’, a faith without substance or credentials” (Letcher 2000).

This quite explicitly animist perspective now appears even in writings concerning Chaos Magick — although here Carroll describes it as “Quantum-Panpsychic-Neopanthicism” (Carroll 2010, 248), which he describes as the ‘default paradigm’ for Chaos Magick practitioners.⁹ It is particularly intriguing that Carroll also draws an ethical conclusion based upon reciprocal relationship from this perspective (when his earlier work has often gone to antinomian extremes in denying or overcoming ethics), stating that: “If everything has life it all deserves our respect and it may respond to our attempts to communicate and negotiate with it” (Carroll 2010, 248).

The animist Pagan ethical position is set out with considerable elegance and at some length by Restall Orr, who acknowledges the possibility (and, for her, the undesirability) of Letcher’s ‘virtual Paganism’, when she critiques:

...the behavior of drunken or ill-informed protestors... litter left at stone circles by Pagan visitors, candle wax spilled on ancient tomb shrines... [*and states that*] It is impossible to feel proud of being Pagan beside those whose religious expression is mostly theatrical posturing or whose ‘green

⁹ When they are not using other paradigms.

spirituality' is underpinned by hypocritical consumerism with its casual support of amoral corporations (Restall Orr 2007, 5. *Italics mine*).

Indeed, the teasing out of these different discourses and practices of Paganism is so difficult that she is forced to invent a particular term for the kind of discourse that she is expounding:

Wherever I am referring to a Paganism that is deeply rooted in, informed by, and expressed through this devotional reverence for nature, for landscape and ancestry, in as much as I understand it, I shall use instead the word **Pagan* (Restall Orr 2007, 35).

Jones critiques this discourse of nature, suggesting that:

There is no reason to assume that a 'hands on', interactive Pagan approach to the 'natural world' need necessarily correlate with environmentalist politics to the extent Letcher suggests (Jones 2006, 19).

Jones's approach, by emphasizing both the ways in which traditional indigenous spiritual practitioners can approach technological artifacts as 'en-spirited', and the ways in which some western Pagans embrace the (post)modern urban environment sets up a dichotomy in Pagan thought between 'natural' and 'un-natural', reading the former as 'That which arises from nature', and the latter as 'That which is man-made'. While this is attractive (and probably very representative of one shared by a great many Pagans), I think that it is rather missing the point, and would argue strongly that the key dichotomy is in fact between these esoteric (symbolic) and animistic (relational) understandings of nature.

Two simultaneous discourses of nature

It is quite apparent that a tension exists between these two discourses of nature within Paganism, but this tension is exacerbated (and complicated) considerably by the fact that for most Pagans, it is not a straight choice between one discourse or another, but rather a sliding scale of both. I have attempted to present this diagrammatically in Figure 6.1, where an individual Pagan’s position might be represented as a line drawn vertically down the diagram. Thus for Restall Orr, MacLellan, Harris and others who would explicitly identify as ‘Eco-Pagan’, the line would be drawn at or near the left of the figure, indicating a near complete acceptance of the animist discourse. For someone practising a ceremonial magic tradition which privileges the esoteric approach, the line would be drawn at or near to the right hand side. The difficulty lies in the fact that most Pagans would fall somewhere in between: simultaneously influenced by both discourses of nature.

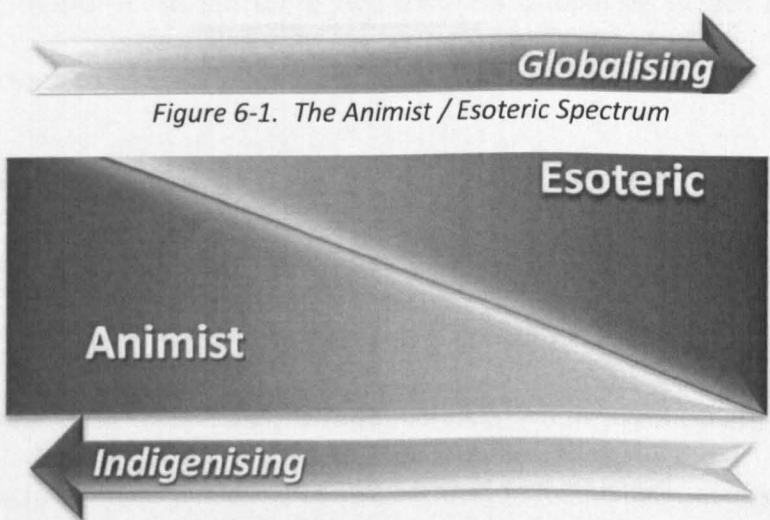


Figure 6-1. The Animist / Esoteric Spectrum

Such uniting of opposites is illustrated in the following quotation from a Wiccan Priestess, talking about her experience of the ceremony of casting the circle in terms that are clearly simultaneously both esoteric and animist:

The single most commonly repeated Pagan ritual action, the act of casting the circle, works on so many levels: we create a literal space, we acknowledge the spirits of place, we walk the space many times to create the circle, we move from the earth of north, we speak in the east, we move out of space and time, but we still stand upon the earth that we talk to, even as we feel it, we imagine it, in our bones, in our psyche (Rain 2010).

This difficulty is further compounded in that there is no necessary connection between any particular Pagan tradition or set of teachings, and any given situation on this diagram.

However, it is fair to suggest that, working from their rhetoric (that is the public announcements, publications, and teachings) particular traditions could be roughly plotted on a diagram thus (Figure 6.2):

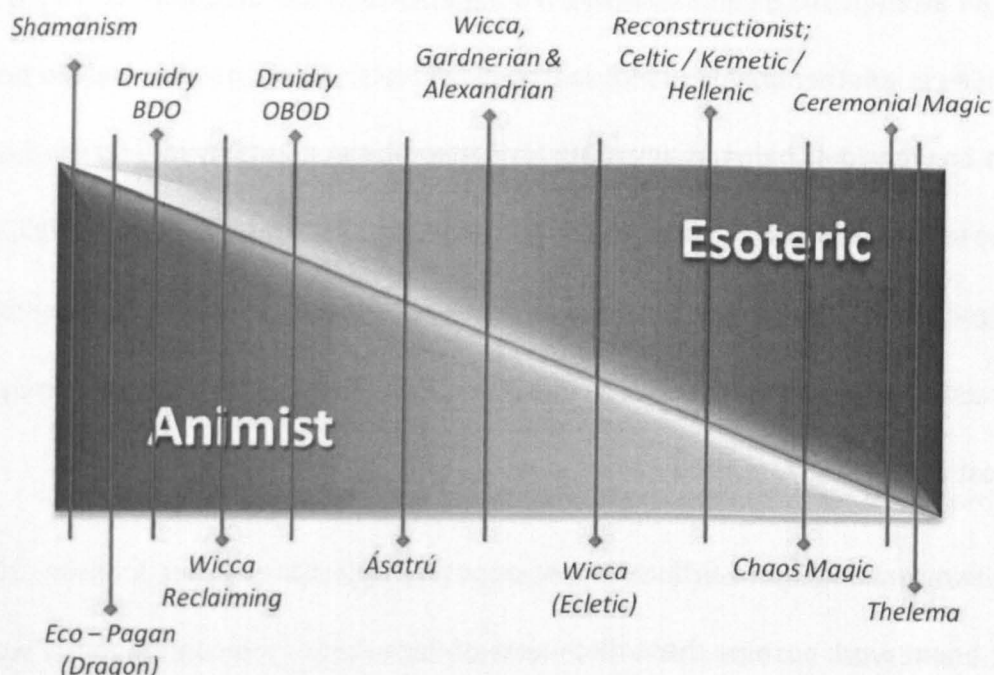


Figure 6-2. Pagan traditions plotted on the Spectrum.

Although, of course, within any particular group, say a Wiccan coven, the creative/ anti-authoritarian spirit that infuses Paganism may mean that different individuals may be at different points, and this will have little or no effect upon their ability to perform ritual, or practise their spirituality, with the rest of the group. I suggest that the inherent tension between these two different discourses is well described by Ezzy (though without explicitly referring to them):

Witchcraft provides a supportive worldview and ritual practice, but the hegemony of consumer capitalism and individualistic culture prevents these from having a significant impact... consumer capitalism, drawing on anthropocentric and self-centred threads within Witchcraft, encourages Witchcraft in the direction of self-centred individualism. In contrast, many Witchcraft rituals and beliefs encourage the development of a sense of sacred relationship with the other-than-human world (Ezzy 2006 b, 51).

Like all attempts to diagrammatize lived experience, the true picture is also more complex in another way — which is that individuals' situations at any given point, must be viewed as being at any given time as well: the creativity inherent in Pagan approaches means that an individual may move rapidly along the scale as well, and not perpetually occupy one position. I have often encountered an approach characterised by tension between the two discourses where individuals may be almost pulled in different directions at once.

The two arrows (Figure 6.1) represent opposing trajectories (after Johnson, 2002) that are at work pushing these discourses of Paganism in the contemporary world. The animist discourse is pushed by the indigenizing forces: for Pagans who seek to embed their beliefs and practices within their own direct experiences, this will drive a tendency to appreciate nature *qua* nature — the world that is directly appreciated through their own somatic experience. For Pagans who seek a greater uniformity of belief and practice amongst different groups around the world, the globalizing trajectory pushes them in the direction of the esoteric discourse.

A good illustration of the tension between the two trajectories is the debates that have taken place amongst Pagans, notably Wiccans, in Australia. When Wicca was first imported, it came rooted in a northern European experience, where the festivals marking out the wheel of the year referred to a calendar based around four seasons in the northern hemisphere. The question, of course, was 'should Wiccans continue to celebrate these festivals based upon a calendar and seasons that are not appropriate to where they are physically situated'? On the most basic level, midsummer and midwinter are reversed between the hemispheres so many

Pagans simply reversed the normal course of the wheel of the year. Those Pagans who chose to carry on with following the traditional calendar re-interpreted the meanings of the festivals with a strong symbolic element, thus understanding celebrating the midwinter festival of Yule in the middle of summer as a primarily symbolic description of a primarily spiritual reality (and of course, lay themselves open to accusations of 'virtual Paganism').

Some Australians even insist on sticking completely to the Northern Hemisphere method, Compass attributes, Deosil and Widdershins AND even the Sabbats! Their justification is that rituals occur on the Astral Plane and so it does not really matter what direction you use or on what date the Seasons fall in the real world (Tully 2009).

Other Pagans chose to reverse the celebration of the festivals into a calendar reflecting the lived realities of the southern hemisphere that they inhabited, although both these solutions are really demonstrating the influence of the globalizing trajectory. The idea of 'carrying on regardless' with what are perceived as traditional practices in order to claim authenticity as Wiccans is paramount. As Tully points out:

By merely transplanting the sabbats, we impose a veneer of imported tradition on top of the Australian Landscape, denying the existence of the Spirit of Nature arising from within the land itself. Stubbornly sticking to a European-themed seasonal calendar is a way of ignoring the often harsh and confronting aspects of the Australian landscape, and merely playing at

being in an imaginary 'Celtic' land. The physical fact that we, the practitioners, are situated within Australia is the fundamental core of the matter (Tully 2003, 172).

Tully's call is for a new Australian approach eliciting the creation of a new ritual calendar based more precisely upon the embodied experiences. Here we can see the animist discourse being driven by the indigenizing trajectory. If one is to be a 'real Pagan' (rather than a 'virtual' one), then surely, they argued, one should have celebrations based around the lived experience of the southern hemisphere. Although here there are all kinds of questions thrown up about the term 'indigenous', as, of course, there are already indigenous spiritual practices honouring the Earth. Though, as Tully points out, "To create meaningful contemporary Sabbat Rituals we need not abandon our inherited traditions, nor usurp Aboriginal spirituality" (Tully 2003, 173).

Having considered the tensions between these two different discourses within Paganism, I must return to the original point — the identity of Paganism as a 'nature religion'. I conclude that fundamentally this remains a correct description. However, a difficulty lies in the fact that there are two distinct, separate, and competitive discourses of 'what nature is', and I will use these two discourses as an analytical tool that will enable me to explore the possibility of embodied ethics within Paganism.

7.

The Landmatters Cooperative

Landmatters is a community cooperative in south Devon, who own and manage 42 acres of land south of Totnes. The land itself is mixed — grassland, woodland, and scrub. It is in a particularly beautiful situation in the South Hams area of Devon (‘an area of outstanding natural beauty’), commanding views as far as Dartmoor to the north. Its proximity to Totnes is noteworthy, in that this town’s involvement with the Dartington College of Arts has transformed it into a centre of alternative lifestyles, with a very open attitude to non-traditional points of view. This is expressed, not only through a vibrant and eclectic mix of attitudes, events, activities, groups and individuals within the town, but also through the fact that some significant ‘alternative institutions’ — Schumacher College and the Sharpham Buddhist Centre, are based nearby.

The community living at Landmatters fluctuates between about six and ten full-time members, plus partners and children. They come from a wide range of backgrounds and have a variety of skills, including sustainable land use, organic horticulture, woodland management and woodcraft, ecology of biodiversity, conservation, arts, education, and group facilitation. All the members of the cooperative are trained in permaculture design.

One key element of the community is a shared commitment to permaculture — a method of design that works with natural systems to provide for the needs of the people that use them. The concept of permaculture arose from work at the University of Tasmania by Holmgren and Mollison, whose underlying philosophy

was attempting to situate a sustainable society upon a basis of sustainable agriculture. Mollison has defined permaculture as follows:

the conscious design and maintenance of agriculturally productive ecosystems which have the diversity, stability and resilience of natural ecosystems. It is the harmonious integration of landscape and people providing their food, energy, shelter and other material and non-material needs in a sustainable way. This includes housing, water systems, transport and the like, and also invisible structures such as legal and financial systems, and the development of supportive social networks (Mollison 1990, 9).

Landmatters emphasize three core ethical principles of permaculture in their thought: *Earth Care* — ensuring the provision for life to continue and multiply; *People Care* — providing access to those resources necessary for physical and spiritual human existence; and *Fair Share* — distributing any surplus of money or information to support the first two principles (Landmatters Cooperative 2006). The community is working towards a low-impact, sustainable community in harmony with the land and regards permaculture as the methodology with which to achieve this.

The full members of the community live in a group of benders and yurts spread over two fields. The benders are magnificent examples of the building technique — large, spacious, and often beautifully decorated, as well as boasting solar power, numerous windows, wood burners, gas powered kitchens etc. (Figures 7.1, 7.2, 7.7, 7.8, 7.10). There is a communal bender and adjoining fire pit that is used for

communal meals, gatherings and regular meetings. Nearby there is a small, informal shrine, decorated with crystals, feathers and a nautilus shell (Figure 7.5). Other shrines are found elsewhere on the site, next to the water pump (Figure 7.11), and in other, privately significant areas (Figure 7.3, 7.6). In the water meadow by the stream, there is the skeleton of a sweatlodge, used for ritual, and the centre of the site is marked by a small ritual circle of quartz stones. There are compost toilets and a wood-framed barn (Figure 7.9) built from their own oak (extracted by horses, cut by a member of the community, and raised by hand with help from a group of volunteers). There are also wood and tool stores, and some simple workshop space. They are involved in small-scale local education projects, welcoming volunteer workers through the Community Supported Farming programme, and WWOOF volunteers, as well as groups from the local Steiner School, and Community Colleges.¹⁰ They hope to expand this programme, and one member has visited the school where I worked to help with an eco-garden project. The community provides a space for residential workshops (including the UK base for Starhawk's 'Earth Activist Training'). Some members of the community supplement their incomes with work in the nearby town of Totnes.

While the cooperative has owned the land since March 2003, members have only been in full-time residence since April 2005. The initial move onto the site followed a substantial period of observation and short visits. This is a significant part of the permaculture approach, as any impact upon an ecosystem can only be judged from an informed position. The time during which most of my research was conducted

¹⁰ "World Wide opportunities on Organic farms". <http://www.wwof.org/>

was one of considerable challenge, as the community were appealing against the refusal of planning permission, which would allow them to legally inhabit the land. Many of the local residents were opposed to the cooperative and had enlisted the help of the local MP. The community's appeal against this decision was supported by a number of eminent alternative organisations. While the appeal was eventually successful and members of the community never really lost their optimism, the lack of certainty about the future of their project placed additional stress upon individual members and the community as a whole.

I first came across Landmatters through a request on the British Reclaiming e-list for "*magical energy*" to support the planning proposal. Such an appeal is another key element of the Landmatters approach and the reason why they are such a suitable subject for study: their idea of permaculture is underpinned by a strong sense of a spiritual relationship with the land around them. Whilst many of the group are overtly Pagan in their outlook, others are not (there is one practising Buddhist from a Tibetan lineage, and an ordained Taoist, as well as others who might not choose the term Pagan, or indeed reject a spiritual discourse altogether), but there is a consistent use of ritual to bring the community closer together and to grow closer to the land, as well as regular energy work, celebrations of the wheel of the year, and a very Pagan outlook in much of their discourse.

My initial visits to the site were as a volunteer worker, but I quickly established my identity as a researcher. However, this specific identity was one that quickly faded as I carried on working on the site, and indeed, still visit regularly to participate in voluntary work days as well as to gather research materials through

participant observation and more formal interviews. Although living off-site, and with the amount of time available for visits curtailed by work commitments, I feel part of the 'wider community' of friends and supporters that surrounds Landmatters, and am certainly always welcomed warmly when I visit.

Relationships and the land

Many contemporary Pagans will articulate their spirituality in terms of relationship with the land. Indeed the frequency of the statement of the derivation of Pagan from the Latin *paganus* — countryman, would lead the enquirer to think that this is almost a universal constant. This is far from the case, however. As numerous writers (Harvey 1997, Letcher 2000, Bowman 2000, York 2003, Restall Orr 2007) have pointed out, the idea of land or nature with which the Pagan relates may be an idealised, or symbolic one, rather than an engaged, embodied relationship with 'real land'. Letcher's challenge to Pagans who are not environmentally engaged that they are merely practising a 'virtual religion' (Letcher 2000) has been discussed elsewhere. A similar challenge to the level of engagement with the natural world is articulated by Clifton: "Live so that someone ignorant about Paganism would know from watching your life or visiting your home that you followed an 'earth religion'" (Clifton 1994, 126). The perspective that is critiqued here would be the one that I have identified as following the *esoteric* discourse of nature. There is little doubt that for many Pagans such critiques of their engagement would indeed be keenly felt, but the interviewees at Landmatters have chosen to embody their worldview in a lifestyle which allows them to engage deeply with the natural world, embodying the *animist* discourse of nature. This is a form of engagement with

which many other Pagans have a profoundly ambiguous relationship: longing for simple, rural living in an idealised way, with little consideration of the fact that it is terribly hard work to live simply. Many of my interviews took place in benders during winter weather, and the interviewees would often refer to their engagement in embodied, experiential ways, gesturing about them to the benders which creak and flex in the wind, or allowing the sounds of wind and lashing rain to speak on the tape. Even living for a short time on the site, one felt a profound sense of engagement with the aspect of nature that Mulligan identifies as the 'wild' — the "sensuous, embodied experiences of wildness (rather than the narrower concept of wilderness)" (Mulligan 2001, 30). While many would view this way of life as an ideal towards which to aspire, it is, in fact, profoundly difficult and above all hard work. Just doing the things that one needs to do — ensuring that there is water and a fire to make a cup of tea, performing repairs to benders, maintaining raised beds — it is easy to have an entire day swept away by the demands of the most basic elements of the life. Living in the rhythm of daylight hours, aware of the passing of the days and seasons, away from the tyranny of clocks, a new awareness, a new way of being is inevitable. As I have noted above, Letcher specifically describes this way of being, 'living out', as a specifically Pagan lifeway.

This embodied and engaged connection with nature is an important part of life at Landmatters for many of the cooperative members. Indeed, for many of them it is one of the primary motivations for being there. In the interviews that I performed, members of the community had the space to tell their own stories, and the ideas that they articulated were ones of profound yet subtle relationships between

groups, individuals, and the surrounding landscape. These relationships are embodied, in the sense that they are not intellectual, but are gradually awakened awarenesses that arise from the lived experience of an individual out in nature. Rooh, who had spent some time travelling with a handcart, explained how the core of this experience, slow movement through the landscape, had enabled her to become aware of the subtle effects of the landscape upon the group with which she was travelling:

I mean, spontaneously, I just find it really fascinating that I just spontaneously end up having some sort of experience that was tuned into the time of the year. Like I would end up breaking up a relationship at Samhain, even though I hadn't intended to break that relationship at Samhain, or I would end up meeting a new lover at Beltane, or having a cleansing. You know that things would happen which were just synchronised with the energy of that time of the year. Especially when I was travelling. The landscape ... was affecting us as a group — if we were in a watery place, then lots of sort of emotional stuff would come up, and just how the dynamics in the group of us who were travelling together would alter according to a) the place that we were in, and b) the time of the year that we were in (Star 2006).

Other members of the group articulated a similar vision. Emma, for example, talked about how her experience of living on a road protest camp had plunged her into an awareness of a deep relationship with the land, and the way that this

affected her by fulfilling her own needs and by giving her new perceptions and ways of thinking.

I learned a huge amount about being in nature, and the nourishment that I got from that, and the wisdom that I got from that, without even knowing what it was. This kind of soft, gentle, kind of osmosis of something very powerful that just permeates you from being in that environment (Emma 2006).

The use of the term ‘osmosis’ is interesting here, as it implies a subtle, gradual, almost imperceptible, interchange: a gentle flow of relationship felt through the physical, rather than an intellectual decision or process.

Even Charlotte, who does not think of herself as ‘particularly Pagan’, used a discourse of embodied relationship when describing how she had developed a ‘feel for Land’, in that period when the group was trying to decide upon which piece of land to buy:¹¹

Well each piece had a feeling to it, and some places were quite dark or quite often on a bit more kind of exploration I might find different signs of why that might be, or why I might have been picking up on that — big stones in badger holes, or just kind of little signs that the Land was somehow at war with what was going on. Or signs of pollution or something, and then other bits of Land would feel a bit like an arm-chair, just really comfy, and this was

¹¹ I’ve capitalised “Land” here, as this was very much the way in which Charlotte talks about it — one can “hear the capitals” in what she says. Charlotte’s discourse of Land is clearly deeply relational, and consequently, this seems most appropriate.

one of them, except it was quite a lot more than an arm chair — very, kind of almost stately, it felt very ancient, very solid and as though it hadn't changed for a long time in itself (Charlotte 2006).

It would be easy to dismiss this kind of discourse as analogical language, a pictorial representation of thought, but I think that a more profound understanding might be gained by reading it in Lackoff and Johnson's terms as a *primary metaphor* — a way of talking about a particular, abstract idea using terms that are familiar from the experience of embodiment. Charlotte's instinctive understanding of, and initial encounter with the Land is one that she feels through her body, and therefore is one about which she speaks using bodily concepts. The feelings arise before the knowledge of the reasons why those feelings might arise ("on a bit more kind of exploration I might find different signs of why that might be"), and the use of the primary metaphor of "the Land as feeling like an Arm Chair" is one that carries an enormous amount of baggage through shared experience. We know what it is like to sit in a favourite old chair — not merely comfortable and relaxing, but one in which we feel welcomed, perhaps because it has, over time, adapted to our own shape. We feel safe and secure because we are both familiar with and comforted by the physical enclosure. We know at once a great many of the ideas that Charlotte is articulating — safety, comfort, warmth, welcome, 'at-home-ness' through a shared bodily awareness.

The discussion of relationship was something that many of my interviewees found difficult to articulate. Even Ollie acknowledged this:

I want to feel connected to sort of natural cycles, to the ecological systems, into some sort of energy that's here. There aren't really quite adequate words for what's going on here. There's a lot mediated through humans all the time (Ollie 2008).

Ollie's position was somewhat ambivalent. The other members of the community often described him as simultaneously the 'most Pagan' (in the sense of being profoundly active in his engagement and activism), and the 'least Pagan' (in the sense that he repudiated this, or indeed, any kind of spiritual tag or label), so this acknowledgement is significant.

This relationship to the land that is clearly a part of the experience of many of the individuals living at Landmatters is perceived as one aspect of a broader network of relationships in which they understand themselves as being embedded. While this may seem similar to many aspects of Pagan discourse such as the 'Web of Wyrd', or 'Indra's net', it seems to me to be subtly different, and more fundamentally animist in its understanding, as it does not over-complicate the discourse of relationships by using complex spiritual language; similar language is used to describe relationships with trees, with animals, with one another, and with the broader community. This is a point where the permaculture understanding of all life as an interconnected matrix flows complementarily with both a Pagan world view, and a lived experience:

... relationship is very important, and that's not just relationship between people, but relationships between people and places, and people and

plants, and people and trees, and relationships between where you put the compost toilet, and where everybody lives, and it's relating on all levels really. And the stronger and more frequent beneficial relationships you can build, then the better the whole. That feeds the whole (Star 2006).

This concept of relationship with the surrounding world is one that sounds like a typical idea of the green movement in general, but in fact, while it uses very similar language, is subtly and profoundly different. Relationship in this context is not a *metaphorical understanding*, but a *genuinely appreciated 'I-Thou' relationship*. The key difference is explained by the shaman and ecologist, Gordon the Toad:

I find deep ecologists celebrate the relationships between things, and the need for recognising the very fundamental nature of those relationships, but where they do talk about 'other awareness-es' or other consciousness, they don't really mean it. It seems to be used more as a way of you projecting yourself into something else, to look at the world from a different perspective (McLellan 2004b).

This idea, that there is a wealth of other consciousnesses or awareness to which individuals inter-relate is also part of the discourse of relationship articulated by my interviewees at Landmatters. Like Gordon the Toad, they also chose to use the language of consciousness or energies when talking about specific relationships that they felt they had within nature:

I started to just tune into the fact that nature is alive, that trees and plants and rocks have some form of consciousness, or indwelling spirit, and if

you're, you know, quiet enough, and listen hard enough these things can communicate to you in some way (Star 2006).

There was also an awareness of the fact that these 'I-Thou' relationships could be deepened, not merely through passive attention, but through making an effort to spend time exploring them more deeply:

I started to get the feeling that trees have different energies, before that they were just trees, and I started to get a feeling of their different characters so to speak, and I started to learn their names (Emma 2006).

This deepening of the relationship with the land has a profound effect upon many of the members of the cooperative. Although most of them had already had experiences of such relationships, it was the opportunity to spend an extended period of time in a particular situation in the landscape that has allowed them to deepen this further. One of the more unusual and significant aspects of the Landmatters co-op is that it is intended to be permanent. It is neither the usual liminal and temporary space of a protest camp, nor a traveller encampment. This allows those individuals who already feel this sense of connection or relationship to work upon it, and deepen it in a slow and subtle way. Many individuals articulate this in terms of a subtle sense of feeling right, unconsciously echoing Charlotte's idea of the 'Land as a favourite arm chair'. Certainly Ambuka talks very explicitly about this:

It means a certain relaxing in my soul to be honest... being here is right, there is a certain rightness about it, that somewhere deep inside I can relax,

and I don't think I've done that for years and years and years (Ambuka 2006).

Underlying the discourse of relationships is an instinctive realisation of sacredness, and this is very much a Pagan sense of the sacred. This is not the sacred of the world created by an external god, or imbued with spirit that animates 'dumb matter', but the sacred that is recognised by the attitude that celebrates what is — in Starhawk's words: "Choosing to take this living world, the people and creatures on it, as the ultimate meaning and purpose of life, to see the world, the earth, and our lives as sacred" (Starhawk 1982, 11). The discourse of Landmatters is one that views all space as sacred, but at the same time allows for the definition of particularly 'Sacred Spaces', either temporary ones created by humans for ritual, or the recognition of more permanent pre-existing ones in and around the site. Rooh uses the language of sacred space when talking about a feature under the site — the water dome.

I really like the fact that the first place that defined itself on the land was the water dome, which became our sort of sacred space, and I really like that, that that is where we started, that our impact on the land, that the first change that we made was defining that sacred space (Star 2006).

This particular sacred space was defined through the detection of a water dome under the land by dowzers — embodied cognition at its most direct, with the body of the dowser explicitly relating to the surrounding landscape to pass on information to the conscious mind.

In many respects this was an extension of the initial permaculture observations, but as the relationship between the group and the land continues to deepen, this kind of reciprocal relationship, using embodied knowing from the land to influence the community is one that has continued through the choice of explicit methods — such as using “Goethian observation” techniques to allow embodied expression of intuitive relationship to the land:

The siting of the communal [bender] is being moved because of this subtle, tuning in process. I hope that the land, that the spirits of the land are supporting us to make the right choices as well, and I feel like that, I felt like that very strongly at the beginning when it all came together, when we brought the land, and made our first circle together, it was so right (Ambuka 2006).

Rooh also suggested that embodied knowing might inform their life as a community in more *ad hoc* magical ways:

I feel like, you know, we kind of almost unconsciously align ourselves with the natural forces by living more closely to the earth, and therefore like, kind of manifest things, almost without, not without intending them, but without doing loads of high magic around them (Star 2006).

This discourse of relationship, as Gordon the Toad pointed out, is a difficult one, as it is often used in the broader green movement in an allegorical way, whereas at Landmatters, there is a shared sense that the language of ‘spirit of place’, and of ‘natural awareness’ is not allegorical, but one that is articulating a shared

experience of relationship. These key differences were expounded by Emma, who identified what she felt were the key differences in these understandings of 'relationship':

At the time I was starting to become more aware of green politics, I suppose, and I met a few people that were into activism, but was completely turned off by them, because they seemed to be really heady, really hierarchical, really angry people who weren't actually aware of the kind of, of nature actually — it was much more a kind of society thing. I did get involved with some kind of activist stuff...I felt very drawn to this scene, but then felt quite disillusioned by the kind of lack of community and lack of real kind of exploration into nature. It was much more about society's politics than about nature itself (Emma 2006).

It is particularly significant that Emma's discourse is one that situates the *hierarchical and political anger in the 'head' of the individuals*, indicating that their understanding of 'nature' is one that is profoundly shaped by their intellectual processes, and expressed in a manner that is moderated by their own egos. It would be easy to argue that such a differentiation is one that arises from the influence of Cartesian dualism upon western culture. When trying to talk about the limits that the intellect places upon relationship to nature, Emma instinctively uses a discourse that identifies the boundaries circumscribed by the intellect. She also clearly implies the opposite about her own perception of her own relationship with nature: not 'heady', but embodied; not thought, but felt and lived. Thus it is much

deeper and more rooted in a sense of wider community, not just in the sense of the community of activists, but in the sense of the community of all beings.

Such a conflict between the intellectual and embodied is also part of the self-understanding of some individuals in the community. A person may have a profound awareness or particular attitude that has arisen through embodied experience, yet when they try and articulate this, as with all human discourse, it must be moderated by the intellect to be put into words, with the result that they may accuse themselves of sentimentality or wishful thinking. Charlotte's feelings about the wildlife of the site, which spring from a very deep sense of relationship and love, are hard for her to express, and she begins doing so by critiquing what she sees as her own tendency to anthropomorphise those relationships:

I'm having quite a long discussion with myself about anthropomorphising ... it seems absolutely obvious to me that all these creatures have a way of being and they have sense and responses that correlate to things that we have words for. And I believe quite, it's not belief so much, as I want very much for all creatures to be able to live their lives as they should live them, without hindrance really (Charlotte 2006).

A positive position

One aspect of the relationship between Landmatters and the world, which is different to those groups studied by other academics (Harris 2000b, Letcher 2000) is that the underlying motivation is predominantly positive and non-confrontational, as opposed to life on protest camps, which are by their very nature

temporary, liminal spaces where individuals seek to confront, to protest against actions, attitudes or situations with which they disagree. This point was keenly appreciated by the interviewees who see what they are trying to do in Gandhian terms, as 'being the change that they would like to see in the world'. Rooh speaks for many members of the community when she says:

I've done a bit, of saying 'NO' to things, of saying stuff I don't want — saying no to the bypass, saying no to GM crops by pulling them up, saying no to the G8 by going to disrupt it. So I went through this whole process of saying NO, and realised that I wanted to be saying "Yes" to things, and like be creating the world that I wanted. I spent a lot of time going round going 'It's all mad, it's really fucking mad, the whole world's mad — it's mad!', every day going 'It's really fucked up, it's mad.' But there's no point in being angry and expecting somebody else out there to sort it out. I just felt like in order to change the world you can only change your little world. So in my own little way in my own little world, I feel like, living here is my way of trying to create the world that I want. And the world that I want is a world where we live with more sensitivity and connection to nature, we live in a more cooperative and communal way where we share resources and support each other, and we live more simply (Star 2006).

This is the point at which some individuals within the Landmatters community begin to really demonstrate what I mean by an embodied approach to ethics. Their choice of lifestyle is not a conventional one — it is hard work, uncomfortable, and fraught with the difficulties of rejection by the wider community. Although

Landmatters is intended to be a permanent community, the pressure of the legal actions against them add a sense of liminality, but there is still a drive to make things better — “I feel compelled to take action, but to make rather than destroy — to make something positive happen” (Maren 2006). There is a shared sense of a vocation, of a calling, to deepen that relationship, both for themselves, and as examples to others:

I felt I was kind of drawn to live like this, and I feel like, we are finding ways to reconnect to the land in a really powerful way to connect to spirit, and a really powerful way to reintegrate ourselves into a natural way of being (Emma 2006).

This is not a simple or easy choice, so why would someone make it? Well, there are many good, intellectually sound reasons for living in this manner, but the reasons that my interviewees all articulated arose from their profound awareness of their intimate entanglement in a web of relationships.

It is ironic that a community that starts from this inherently positive point of view is forced into a confrontational position by the reactions of the wider world, whose methodologies for dealing with such communities are by their very nature predicated upon confrontation and built upon a foundation of fear of the other.

Smith provides an explanation of this when he says that:

As with previous expressions of antinomianism, the actions and rhetoric of radical environmentalism are often regarded as signs of irrationality. Those who contest... are portrayed as abnormal (Smith 2000, 133)

Even within the milieu of the South Hams, where most homes are in fact owned by ‘incomers’, there is a strongly expressed and consistent propaganda attempting to do just this.

Validation by Synchronicity

Another significant theme of relationship at Landmatters is the recognition of and valuing of synchronicities — that is, events that might seem to be beneficial coincidences, and ascribing to them an element of non-human guidance or particular value. Such a view, experientially validating the idea that the relationship with nature is a genuinely reciprocal ‘I-Thou’ encounter, was also expressed by one of Letcher’s informants: “Trust that you’re there for the Earth, and the Earth looks after you — and it does” (Letcher 2003, 72). This is such a common part of their world-view that its implications need to be explored in depth. The vast majority of these events are interpreted as demonstrations of the support given by the network of relationships in which they are immersed, for the actions that they undertake and the ends they pursue. It is the other side of the relationship between the individual and the land discussed above. Just as the individual grows closer to the land, and demonstrates that in a variety of ways, so it is possible for the community members to see a sense of care and concern, or a shared sense of purpose being manifested in the opposite direction. It is clear that this view of events is one that many brought with them to Landmatters:

it gave me a sort of deep sense of trust in the goddess, in the universe, whatever you want to call it. That somehow things are not just randomly

unconnected, because what we needed was given to us. We didn't need very much, and that's probably why we got what we needed — we weren't asking for very much either. Just little things that I would wish for that would then manifest later on in the day. Especially on road protests and stuff, great bits of synchronicity — just the bit of tat that you needed to make this crazy treehouse or barricade or whatever it is that you're making — just the right thing would come along, just the right thing would turn up, or the person that you needed to see would turn up round that corner (Star 2006).

This sense of validation, the idea that the universe makes it easy for them to achieve certain things, is most obvious in the way that they talk about the origins of the Landmatters cooperative. There is a series of particular events which are understood as pivotal to the cooperative coming together, and in their collective experience have become important elements in the validation of the decisions that they made, both individually and collectively, to begin the project. These events have, in turn, become part of their shared mythology — the story that they tell about themselves.

In the initial stages of the project, when there was little concrete idea of how it might end up, there was an awareness of a sense that it was likely to 'flow', purely out of the fact that there was such an obvious web of connections between the people involved — even if the core group initially seemed to be strangers: "Although the people who eventually decided to have a go didn't know each other, there were lots of webs of interconnections between everybody" (Star 2006). For

many individuals this sense of the innate rightness of what they were doing in getting involved in the Landmatters project was validated by such important experiences. These experiences included members of the group meeting people that they knew on the land, ("Richard, who isn't with us anymore, was walking up here one day at the very beginning, and bumped into some people who he had met on an action in Germany some years before" (Ambuka 2006)) and just the ease and speed with which the decision to get involved came to fruition:

As soon as I came to the meeting I thought "Oh, I want to be part of this"... And I had just been in Scotland a week before, didn't know what I was doing, and here I was in Devon with a boyfriend and a place to live, and a land project within the space of 24 hours (Emma 2006).

So the idea articulated by Emma, that there was considerable validation from the universe for getting involved with this project, is one that many of the group would share:

Obviously I made the decision to stay here and get involved with this project, but on another level I almost had no choice, it was just 'You set that intention, and here you are'. It felt very synchronistic, very like there was something else going on as well (Emma 2006).

Probably the most significant event like this (in terms of the validation of this particular project) was the Earth Activist Course run by Starhawk (which incorporated elements of both permaculture and reclaiming style Eco-magic), which several members of the cooperative had (independently) attended just

before the land came up for sale. The two elements of the course combined for many of them, and they found themselves sitting round discussing what they would do if they could get hold of some land. As followers of the permaculture approach it is not surprising that they all had similar views about living in touch with nature and developing a sustainable lifestyle. However, this was combined with some of the magical techniques that had been taught during the week, and a simple, ad-hoc ritual event took place, where a group of individuals focussed upon putting energy into this intention. When all the activists arrived home, they found that this simple act of magic appeared to have worked, as they had e-mails from a common friend who had already put in an offer for the land:

Wouldn't it be nice if we had a bit of land, so we put out for it — we sat a few minutes in silence, and just put out for it. And a couple of weeks after the course we got an email off this guy Christian, who lives down here in Totnes, and he had put in an offer for this bit of land, and it was accepted, so he sent out his vision of an eco-village, and it sounded really nice when we read it, although we were looking for land around Lancaster, but it sounded just so 'WOW' (Maren 2006).

The significance of this event cannot really be overstated. It is not merely the event to which they all refer, but it is special in the way that it combines the areas of permaculture and magic in such a way that they function together to underpin and reassure them of the choices that they have made. They feel the land around them and the larger universe affirming their choices, a relationship based upon genuine reciprocity.

Ritual and relationship

For many who write or talk about Paganism, from both emic and etic perspectives, probably the most significant indicator of 'being a Pagan' is the praxis of engaging in ritual. There is, of course, a large spectrum of understanding of what ritual is within the Pagan community, from the intense rituals of ceremonial magicians, involving careful scripting, the memorising of large chunks of text, strict adherence to prescribed patterns of action, the use of particular sacramental tools and costumes, elaborate and careful preparation: through similar, but looser understandings in Wicca and Druidry, through to the ludic, chaotic, and spontaneous happenings of Eco-Paganism and some Chaos Magick. There are however, some elements of commonality in that there is an intention, a purpose to the ritual; and energy is raised and consciously applied to that intention. The key over-arching commonality is that ritual is embodied — it is something that is done, experienced through physical participation. Harris asserts that this embodiment, in fact, leads back into a deepening sense of relationship with the living world:

What I call 'Somatic Knowing' is grounded in the body. It's beyond ego and brings an awareness of the unity of all things. My eco-magic emerges from this other way of knowing (Harris 2000b).

The ritual activity at Landmatters tends to be loose and ad-hoc, influenced by the approaches of more informal traditions like Reclaiming Wicca, Eco-Magic, and Druidry, and what Letcher identifies as the 'reality of living out':

Similarly other rituals emerge out of necessity or the reality of living out... No ritual structure is required; the solidarity of holding hands is enough. Beltaine, the celebration of the return of Spring, is celebrated with a greater passion when one has overwintered in a bender or treehouse. Often only a very informal ritual structure is employed, allowing the spirit of the moment to flow unimpeded by dogma (Letcher 2000).

This informality and spontaneity is an important part of the ritualizing in such a setting. It serves to set the ritual within a firm context of 'normality', of shared, lived experience, rather than in the conscious attempt to journey out of normal consciousness that is more frequently thought about in this context. Ritual at Landmatters is not particularly special or indeed, particularly stylized, as Plows points out when describing ritual in a protest camp:

Magic isn't 'out there' - it is the everyday. Of course, then there are special occasions too...Often it's all just a feeling. It was more like performance poetry and very different from formalised ritual (Plows 2000).

Such a perception of ritual is also offered, from a Druid perspective, by Emma Restall Orr, who describes her rituals as simple events that are aimed at profoundly engaging individuals with the world around them, inducing a state of awareness or mindfulness — "In some ways they are simply about being fully here and now". (Restall Orr 2000b). The ritual at Landmatters is, however, substantially situated within a recognizably Pagan structure. Graeme stated:

I think ritual, that aspect of ritual focussed around the Celtic four element system is probably the most common thread through people's spirituality here — it's the one that most people have adopted (Graeme 2006).

Having said that, the significance of ritual within the community is acknowledged more broadly, even by those, such as Ollie, who go out of their way to distance themselves from any form of Paganism:

Those sorts of ceremonies and rituals, if they help people to feel a part of this place and connect to it in some way, well that's good. It's not calling on other powers in the sense of a super-powerful god, but calling on the wind to do things with the sun, or mother earth or father sky — that's calling on other powers, I suppose (Ollie 2008).

In many respects, such ideas of ritual are really very different from many other understandings of ritual in contemporary Paganism. It is most profoundly about engaging the individual in the world, rather than moving 'up and out', but even more fundamentally it is their lack of 'specialness' or subtlety that marks them out. It would be easy for an outsider to miss much of the ritual activity at Landmatters, or to mistake it for something else, as it is so profoundly integrated into the 'ordinary' ways of being. For most ritual practitioners, rituals are a particularly special time, times of highly charged being, requiring considerable preparation, as well as prolonged grounding afterwards. For most Pagans, it is the 'specialness' of ritual that is important — the wearing of particular clothes or regalia, the deliberate preparation of the self, and the place, that enables the rituals to 'work'. This is thus

a marked contrast to the kinds of ritual activity that I am describing here. I think that it is also significant to situate these different attitudes to ritual on the animist/esoteric scale, too, where the Landmatters style of ritual represents a particularly animist approach, in contrast to the esoteric influence that brings so much from the ceremonial magic tradition into Paganism.

Much of the ritual language at Landmatters is profoundly influenced by Reclaiming Witchcraft, with an explicit emphasis upon Reclaiming style 'Grounding'; this practice emphasises the necessity of 'earthing power', literally returning magical energy to the earth after it is raised in ritual. Starhawk describes it thus: "Relax and let the force flow through you... let it flow deep into the earth... where it will be cleansed and renewed" (Starhawk 1989, 59). Rituals are performed either individually or in groups, and these groups may include visitors from outside the cooperative. A small group of the residents (mainly the women) regularly participate in a daily 'morning circle' (a practice acquired on the Starhawk training course), and seasonal celebrations, as well as direct ritual in response to particular issues (the planning application, for example). The women of the group also often attend 'Grandmother's circle' in Totnes, a monthly spiritual journeying group using Indigenous American imagery, where individuals undergo trance journeying to visit archetypal ancestral grandmothers. This eclectic approach is a mark of the kind of instinctive, re-indigenised Paganism that is the hallmark of Landmatters, and reflects an explicit thirst for establishing their own ritual pattern:

I started to have a real thirst for finding out any little bits of information about our culture and our celebrations and our wisdom and our medicine,

and our knowledge from the land, and our magical people... our myths
(Emma 2006).

This desire to celebrate the land in ritual is also seen as a culmination of a current of thought within the wider activist community. Indeed this is sometimes approached and validated through the synchronicity mentioned above:

I remember at an Earth First! gathering some years before, someone had put Magical Activism on an agenda, and I went there and it was heaving, it was the biggest workshop that I've been to at any Earth First! gathering, and the people who had called the space didn't really know what they wanted to do either, and all the people who came didn't know what they wanted to do — they just wanted to explore it and find out, so I think that the Starhawk arriving in England was very timely. I think probably more and more people are into it (Ambuka 2006).

The morning circle is a small daily ritual that occurs at the circle of quartz stones in the middle of the site, placed over the top of the water dome located by dowsers. Members of the group meet there, cast a simple circle, honour the directional elements, and perform body and energy work to prepare for the day, cement their relationships to one another and to the broader communities of the site, and to set intentions. These tend to be very simple, *ad-hoc* rituals, although they are particularly significant in that they emphasise bodily movement rather than speech. For example, at one that I attended, the elements were not honoured in a 'conventional' Pagan way (through oral invocation accompanied by the drawing of

pentagrams in the air), but through the 'Balinese dance of the Goddess' — a series of physical movements, which involved reaching upwards to pull down energy from the sky, reaching downwards to pull up energy from the earth, and then pulling in energy from each of the cardinal directions, combining that energy within, and offering the combined energy back to the directions. This embodied technique of honouring the elements was particularly appreciated by members of the community:

We've got this thing, this movement, the Dance of the Goddess from Bali, where you scoop up the energy from the earth, and connect to the sky, and bring that down to your body, and then mix it all up, and shoot your arrow of love and intention out into the world — you do that in all four directions, a really nice way of doing it (Maren 2006).

The preparation for this involved both physical stretching, and each person working on a partner's aura. This was followed by holding hands as a group, and singing a song dedicating ourselves to making an effort to listening to the ancestors (understood as including the land and other beings nearby). Seasonal celebrations also feature an *ad hoc* ritual component, although these are accompanied by more obvious ludic elements. At the Beltane celebration a may pole was erected and danced, before a libation of champagne was poured out with the invocation 'Blessings on the land'.

The significance of ritual for many Pagans is the way in which it gives a space and opportunity for ways of growing closer to the land, and to enable a refocusing on

important personal priorities, particularly in terms of connection with the surrounding world: “We are able to (re)connect or to deepen our relationships within our environment, whatever our theology of deity and spirit” (Restall Orr 2000b). Indeed, the fact that such an emphasis is found in the Landmatters’ experience of ritual is unsurprising considering that Salomonsen identifies “‘connection versus separation’ as a basic ontological and psychological theme dramatized in ritual” (Salomonsen 2002, 158). This idea of ritual as the central pivot around which Pagans negotiate their relationship with the surrounding world is also identified by Magliocco, who argues that: “The importance of ritual, then, is its power to link individuals to the natural world, and to the divine as manifest through nature” (Magliocco 1996, 98). Such an emphasis upon ritual as the key to forging and deepening relationships is one that is particularly important to the Landmatters community:

I mean to gather in a circle, to connect with each other, to have a shared conscious intention, to open to what is here, and to listen to it, and to ask for the help of the energies that are here — the energies of the earth, and the energies of the other elements, and the spirits. And to ask the energies of the trees and the grass, and all the beings, all the different energies, to actually consciously ask for their help is really supportive. When we do, there are some of us that will do it more often, create a smaller circle, but particularly when we do create a big circle and create that intention it’s really mind-blowing how powerful it is (Emma 2006).

One of the ways in which ritual has been used to consciously deepen relationships was the hosting of a “Council of All Beings” at the community. Taylor describes such a council succinctly as:

A ritual means to connect people spiritually to other creatures and the entire planet. Diverse exercises are employed to help people experience their “ecological self” — namely, the self as embedded within the entire web of life, and therefore not superior to other life forms. During these workshops, rituals are performed where people allow themselves to be imaginatively possessed by the spirits of non-human entities — animals, rocks, soils and rivers for example — and verbalize their hurt at having been so poorly treated by human beings. As personifications of these non-human forms, participants cry out for fair treatment and harmonious relationships amongst all ecosystem citizens (Taylor 1996, 549).

For those who took part, both community members and visitors, this was a powerful experience. What was particularly interesting is that the other forms of life that were given voice were all specific to the site, all elements of the local ecosystems within which the ritual was embedded.

The incorporation of ritual into life at Landmatters is not something that happens on a purely corporate level, and for some members of the group it is a vital part of their individual way of life. A good example is the layout of Rooh’s Bender (Figures 7.1, 7.2, 7.3, 7.4), aligned to the cardinal directions:

I suppose I've got this notion that your art, your life, can be like a sort of a creative act, that you can live creatively and artfully, and for me that includes living ritually. I mean this space is aligned to the four directions — I've got my work in the north which is the earth, which is the grounded place, which looks out over the community. And I've got my kitchen in the south, the place of transformation, and with my fire. I've got my bedroom in the east, which is probably a place where I do a lot of thinking as well, I mean my bedroom, my bed is where I read a lot of my books, and like, it's not just somewhere that I go and sleep, it's somewhere that I hang out a lot. Quite how the conservatory works in the west, I'm not really sure (laughs), except that plants need watering! I suppose that I designed this circular space in the middle so that I had room to dance and move, and create works of energy (Star 2006).

This integration of ritual into life, or ritualising of the everyday is very subtle. To an uninformed outsider, there would seem to be no particular spiritual significance to the layout of the space, it would seem merely to be a beautiful living space. This also provides a very good example of how the two discourses of nature which I have identified in Paganism may be simply inter-woven in the *bricolage* of one individual Pagan's approach: while Rooh's relationship with the land is predominantly predicated in the animist discourse of nature, she still finds it important to use the ideas of the esoteric discourse at the same time — thus demonstrating nicely the way that nature may be simultaneously considered as both symbol and reality.

Many individuals at Landmatters also perform specific personal rituals that are more explicit, and performed for individual reasons, such as personal growth, but these also contain profound elements of moving into a closer relationship with the land:

Last equinox I did a ritual in the woods, I had moved stuff from town into the bender — lots of old photographs... I just took some of those photographs, and went into the woods. I collected blood from a few cycles, and went out into the woods, and had a fire there. Burned some of the pictures, and danced round, and asked to integrate the past into who I was then, and stated that I am a woman now, and that I was committing to this place — it felt really good, good, strong ritual, and I felt like really connected to this place (Maren 2006).

This integration of ritual is not, however, something that is unquestioned by all members of the group, as Charlotte points out: “We’re not an intentional spiritual community” (Charlotte 2006). Indeed, incorporating even the simplest ritual practice can seem to go against the community’s main reasons for existing — the hard work of being an intentional permaculture community:

We had a weekend of Listening to the land, supposedly, and people buzzing around doing rituals and this and that all over the place — shut up, I can’t hear anything! And it was kind of frustrating. Cos it helps, well I find it helps to hear the obvious things on the land — like the birds, or the acorns dropping through the trees — so sitting around talking about woodland

spirits and things like that — I suppose I'm a little bit naughty like that, and obviously there is a space where we can celebrate together the times you spent on your own (Charlotte 2006).

Although this slightly sceptical approach is also accompanied by a growing realisation of the potential significance of ritual particularly in building relationships between the group, and with the land:

That's why I'm looking forward to this next part of this moving into the land kind of journey, is that I will, I hope, I will get more and more out of the rituals that we do, that we get better at them, and because we're more plugged into the land there will be a greater need for them. When I say need, it's partly need, but they'll just mean more. I mean it's good to mark the changing seasons wherever you are, but it's of semi-limited relevance if you live in a town or city, whereas this is... I mean I know that we're only within walking distance of the nearest Safeways if we had to, but it is a bit of a step... towards being a bit more connected with the Earth, and getting into what it really did mean, and what it does mean (Charlotte 2006).

There was an over-whelming desire from all the interviewees that the whole business of ritual was something that the community should work at much harder, that the busy-ness of day to day life in the community left them too tired to commit to more regular ritual practice, and that this was something that they wished to move towards — particularly in terms of growing more confident in ritual performance:

Interestingly, I really want to have a discussion about ritual here, perhaps using your thesis as a basis, because I wanted to know what other people, what other people's take on it is (Charlotte 2006).

The Way of Council.

The idea of interdependence also informs the ways that relationships are framed amongst the human members of the Landmatters community. The residents have always been clear about the necessity of living together based upon ideas of shared responsibility, and building consensus, but such ideals are sometimes difficult to manifest in practice. Living in any close community is a challenge, and in spite of shared intentions and commitment, disagreements and arguments are inevitable. In feedback that an anonymous member of the community gave to their initial facilitator they described that:

Living and working together in a small community, there are inevitably areas of disagreement and conflict which arise. Due to lack of time, and possibly lack of courage, we had been largely ignoring these. Consequently they were festering under the surface creating tensions within the group and undoubtedly meaning that we were less effective and most of us unhappy or dissatisfied to some degree (Dreaming 2009).

To begin with it was clear that, while the residents remained completely committed to consensus building and equality, there were frustrations about the interminable nature of some meetings (and indeed their frequency). Meetings were being bogged down by the admixture of several types of 'business'. For example, as well

as decision making about the kinds of trees that should be planted, discussion would then range onto more personal issues as well, and many meetings where simple and straightforward planning decisions could have been taken often dragged on as the space of the meeting was taken up by discussions of other issues. This also made it necessary to have yet more meetings to talk about the issue that was the original subject. In order to address this, the community has adopted a particular technique called “the way of council”. This provides a facilitated space on a regular basis for the community members to articulate and externalise the more personal issues that are affecting them, and means that the business and planning meetings are now able to proceed with greater clarity and speed.

The councils take place roughly every six weeks, deliberately aligned with the “Celtic festival times” (Maren 2009), and each one lasts for a period of six hours. (This is usually divided into two three-hour morning sessions on neighbouring days). During this time the community sits in the circular communal bender, and work together on the ‘council process’. These council sessions are the only mandatory element of life at Landmatters – all residents have to attend, and take turns acting as facilitator for the regular councils. These sessions do not usually begin with a particular theme, but it is apparent that a theme will often emerge. In addition to these regular councils, every February the community undertakes a six day council, which is led by an external facilitator. In addition, if particular issues between individuals emerge from any of the regular sessions, then an additional council session, facilitated between those individuals, will be set up to give people the opportunity to share.

Councils are based upon four key 'intentions' which are described in terms of (an unspecified) "Native" traditional practice. These are intended to "hold the space together... create safety and allow truth and trust to build in this very simple and powerful practice" (Dreaming n.d.). The first of these is 'Listening from the heart', which is an active and attentive style of listening, that is non-judgemental, and which creates space for the second, 'Speaking from the heart'. This is intended to focus each individual upon articulating their own story. During the time of the council participants are encouraged to use 'I language', and to emphasise articulating their emotions. Speaking from the heart can also include non-verbal communication through movement, or indeed through silence. The third is 'Succinctness', which encourages participants to keep their contributions short and powerful, an important element of which is the deliberate and facilitated avoidance of repetition. The fourth intention is 'Spontaneity', no planning should take place. This encourages participants back to their 'listening from the heart'; they should not be thinking about what they are going to say at their next turn, but about what is being said at that moment. These four intentions are rooted in a fundamental principle of confidentiality; the council circle is held quite separate from normal life.

Rob Dreaming, the facilitator who introduced the practice at Landmatters, describes the way in which these intentions are put into practice by using a 'talking piece':

This can be a stick, stone, feather or indeed any object which lends itself to be held by the speaker and at best has some significance to the group or situation. With this in hand, no one is entitled to interrupt or indeed speak

until the piece arrives in their own hand. This isn't is a conversation, but a respectful witnessing and sharing that amongst the many, many gifts of council, minimises reactive behaviour (Dreaming 2009).

After some initial ice-breaking exercises, individuals are encouraged to share the feeling that they are holding, and this begins to build a space where participants feel comfortable about sharing their feelings. Rob described the beginning of the practice at Landmatters:

Eventually someone came into the centre to begin, speaking more generally about problems encountered on site and related personal difficulties, which sparked a flowing motion for others to come into the centre, triggered by former speakers and the general theme. It had the effect of airing gradually, the issues at large. I had been prepared for things to get explosive, but the collective wisdom of the group was choosing a gentler, more gradual approach (Dreaming 2009).

I think that the end of the description is noteworthy. Rob is very experienced in facilitating this kind of work with various different communities (including Damanhur, Osho Leela, Findhorn, the Threshold Centre, Zegg, and Braziers), and his own expectations of the experience "getting explosive" were confounded by the "collective wisdom of the group". While there were (and indeed still are) issues for the residents of Landmatters to work out, it's clear that they were, even at the very start of this process, working from a closely shared interdependence. One of residents, in their feedback on the initial session commented that: "Perhaps the

greatest gift that the week gave us was the form - a simple, ancient and profound way to work with 'stuff'. The stuff of communities, of individuals, of being alive" (Dreaming 2009).

Explicit language of embodiment

One element that is clear in the discourse of magic and relationship at Landmatters is the importance of the body. As I have discussed above, the concept of embodiment is vital to understanding ritual, but it can also be a way of understanding significant moments, as Magliocco reports:

As Steven was speaking to me about the sense of timelessness and transcendence that the ritual along the banks of the Mississippi had induced in him, I became so moved the hair on my forearms stood on end, and I called his attention to it. "That's it!" he exclaimed, "That's how you know a ritual's good" (Magliocco 1996, 100).

At Landmatters, there is a clear relationship between embodied experience and ideas to do with relationship with the land and other entities, as well as other individuals on the site. This emphasis is something that is an inherent part of the lifestyle that they have adopted, that can be expressed in a variety of ways — through the every-day grind of the communal work that sustains the community:

I mean communal work, when it's communal, when you're doing it with a group of people, there are times when you've got five or six people all scything together, and that does feel like communion, it does feel very

present. You're all helping each other to be very present. If you're doing something like scything, you can't really not be present (Emma 2006).

as well as through specific, intentional ritual practice,

We did the sweatlodge on Saturday, and it's a really reconnecting ritual, and um, I ended up totally boiling hot, lying spread-eagled, naked on the earth, in this lodge that is like a womb, just completely surrendered to the earth, and just, that just felt really, really humbling and nourishing to be in that state of... you can't really think in that heat (Emma 2006).

One of the most obvious ways in which the whole issue of embodiment in ritual was discussed by my interviewees was in terms of feeling magical or elemental energies within the body:

I feel a certain movement within my body that I recognise as fire — some kind of energy pattern which is familiar to me because it is me and it's just like waking something up. Sometimes I can feel it, sometimes I can't — I suppose it depends upon how dropped into the moment I am. What I find really helpful, the most powerful way of connecting to me is by moving it. When we call those energies in and dance them, like, you now, I consciously express the energy of air, then I really can feel it, and using sound is really helpful for me — I like to allow things to be expressed as sound, as any kind of form of sound. So, so yeah, I can feel it. I don't think I can really describe it — sometimes I reckon I could probably differentiate — sometimes it just feels like a movement of energy in my body (Emma 2006).

Such an idea of feeling the movement of energy in the body is one that is reiterated:

And I was letting go of this relationship, and I could really feel it, I could really feel my resistance to letting go of this relationship, even though I felt like I had to, and I could feel it physically in my body, and I was breathing into that place in my body, until I could actually get to this point of being genuinely glad to release that cord, that attachment that I could feel to this relationship and put that stick in the fire (Star 2006).

As well as this idea of feeling energy movement within the body, at times a consciously embodied approach is adopted, such as when dowsing the site after first moving on, or in using kinesiology to identify plant species for planting in gardens. This technique involves working closely with the 'Devas' (nature spirits) of the place, and of the plants, and using bodily movement (the resistance of the fingers to pressure) in order to embody and realise the communication between the individual and the spirits that normally would occur on such a subtle level as to be entirely inaccessible to the conscious mind:

I mean when I went through the catalogue for what I was going to plant in my garden, I had a list of things that I wanted, I went through it again, and did muscle testing, and asked "Am I connected to the Deva of the garden?" and basically chose the plants that are going to go in my garden according to what the Deva said, so even though there are some things that I wanted to grow here, on muscle testing they said "No I don't want to be here", so I

haven't put that in. Actually it really helped me pick things without having to get into my head about it, or worry about it too much, it eased up the job of going through the lists, because I just muscle tested for them (Star 2006).

Emma also discussed the experience of a particular dance practice that she performs, where the experience of embodied relationship is moved into another area, where embodied practice leads to the breaking down of the perceived boundaries between the self and the other:

Rather than it being me as an individual and the outside world being out there — me and the outside world, they are the same thing. There might seem to be a visual edge where my arm starts and stops, and the air starts, but actually there isn't — there's just vibrating molecules, there is no boundary it's all just one thing. So feeling a sense of that, and getting it right into the body instead of it being just a conceptual idea (Emma 2008).

Conclusion - living an embodied ethic?

Looking for evidence of an embodied ethic is a very difficult business. There is an amorphous boundary between the direct expression of embodied experience in ethical choices, and ethical choice that might arise from an intellectual source, and there is always the 'risk of cross contamination', particularly as any discussion of embodied ethics must, by its very nature, be mediated through the intellect into ethical language. However, in spite of this I agree with Abram that even if any pre-reflective insights must be reflected upon to be brought to articulation:

there's a wildness that still reigns underneath all these mediations – that our animal senses, coevolved with the animate landscape are still tuned to the many voiced earth... Cocooned in a clutch of technologies, the nervous system that seethes within our skin still thirsts for a relatively unmediated exchange with reality in all its more-than-human multiplicity and weirdness (Abram 2010, 264).

Many of my interviewees were obviously conscious of the complexity of putting these kinds of experiential awarenesses into words. Charlotte critiques herself about anthropomorphism; Emma is aware that: "You might not be able to describe them to someone else, but they are familiar and you just kind of know it" (Emma 2008); Ollie acknowledges that: "There aren't really quite adequate words for what's going on here — there's a lot mediated through humans all the time" (Ollie 2008). All these statements demonstrate that even for the residents themselves, this is by its very nature a difficult thing to bring to articulation. As Varela points out, ethical actions that spring from our experience are not easy to discuss, their very simplicity and immediacy may lead us to overlook them:

Actions such as these do not spring from judgement and reasoning, but from an immediate coping with what is confronting us. We can only say we do such things because the situation brought forth the actions from us. And yet these are true ethical actions; in fact, in our daily, normal life they represent the most common kind of ethical behaviour (Varela 1999, 5).

The whole community discourse of Landmatters is articulated through the language of relationship, and this is clearly understood as embodied. The relationship that my interviewees have with the land where they live is one in which they are continually physically immersed in a very real (as opposed to idealized) experience. The Hindu Bhakti tradition encourages devotees to learn how to understand 'loving God' by giving them examples of the kinds of loving relationships with which they may be familiar (erotic love, loving as a parent, loving as a comrade in arms etc), and then supplying methodologies, mythologies and disciplines for mapping this kind of feeling onto the divine. I'm going to attempt to do something similar here, by explaining the relationship between my interviewees and the land at Landmatters, by analogy with other kinds of relationship that may be more familiar.

For many people in modern western society, and this includes a great many who would describe themselves as Pagans, the relationship with nature may be compared to a teenage crush — it may be very intense, but most frequently takes place at a distance, and is idealized (often fuelled by fantasy). This is the way that many modern urban people approach nature. It is something alluring, beautiful, lush and pleasantly stimulating to the senses. This approach is fuelled by occasional visits which serve to build up an idealized image, which in turn is bolstered by intellectual reflection, and particular portrayals in the media. The relationship here is essentially one way. It is the adoration of a fan from afar. It is intense, but also fundamentally self-centered. My interviewees (both at Landmatters and otherwise) have a profoundly different relationship with nature. It is more like the relationship between an older couple who have spent a long time living together.

By constant sharing over a period of time a very different kind of relationship has developed, one that is much more mutually respectful, and profound. Passion and allure may have been replaced by unspoken understandings or shared silence. The idealized image has been shredded, but replaced by honest self-knowledge, and profound care, as this relationship is centered in the other rather than the self.

There are points within this particular analogy that I think are particularly relevant, which are shared human perspectives. The first key to building any kind of deep relationship is spending time with that other — actually being physically present, and sharing that moment. The more time that is shared, the more profound the relationship will be. A profound moment of realization came to me near the start of my research, when I was interviewing the shaman Gordon the Toad. As we sat on the patio of his friend's house near Bristol on a summer afternoon and talked, he apologized for distractedly picking ticks off his legs, explaining that he had spent the last few days in the woods. I experienced a sudden realization that his relationship with nature arose from that intensity of experience. The woods weren't a place that he visited for inspiration, but quite literally a place where he was at home (and without the insulation of modern camping equipment), a place to which he related on a much more fundamental and primal level than I. I also understood that this was about 'being there', not in some Heideggerian sense of authenticity, but in a more profound sense of 'physically being present in the body'. On one level, a much more simple 'being there', immediately open to common experience, but in a culture that has for so long valorized the mind and intellectualization, one that may be much harder to appreciate. This realization early on in my research prepared me

for my work at Landmatters because the approach in that community was very similar. Another significant factor is that this sharing is on-going, not just a weekend, or a month, but month after month, year after year. This perpetual immersion in the experience of living there eventually deepens and strengthens that relationship. This long, slow approach creates a space where it is eventually possible to allow the relationship to become two-way, and to allow what Emma described as the 'osmosis' of the relationship. Of course, this doesn't always happen as quickly as people would like it to, and for Rooh is entirely contingent upon "how much time I've got to be and to listen" (Star 2006). Charlotte also clearly articulates the same need for a long drawn-out approach:

To be able to spend so much time on one site means that knowledge can be very specific, as opposed to more generalised knowledge of ecology as a subject, so I suppose it is the difference between anthropology and having a relationship (Charlotte 2006).

Rooh, Charlotte, Emma, Ollie, and all the rest of the community spend their lives (or certainly the last few years), living out in nature in a way that few others in modern western society do. The reason why the community members are able to have this particularly deep relationship with the land is essentially framed by their perpetual immersion of shared experience. Like building any deep and abiding relationship, it cannot be done at a distance, or quickly, but is built up over a long period of intense sharing, in tiny, unnoticeable, incremental steps, that eventually build something powerful, abiding and intense. Emma recognised this clearly in her simple statement that: "The more time you spend with a friend the more you get to know

them” (Emma 2008). The centrality of embodiment here is also very apparent in the shared discourse of head and heart that many interviewees shared. They clearly had a shared understanding of a wide gulf between the intellectual, cognitive and thoughtful ‘head’ nature of some decisions, and the emotional, connected, relational nature of ‘heart decisions’, and consciously valorised the latter. This was expressed both in explicit discourse, and in embodied ways through gesture — “I’m really aware of that — moving down into here [*points to body*] rather than up here [*points to head*]” (Graeme, 2006, italics mine).

This relationship with the land is a genuine and honest one, where the experience of the difficulties, both of living out (discussed in greater depth above), and the pressures of living in a community may be sufficient to break down the idealized vision. As Graeme states “I was really struggling with living here, and wanting to be alone, alone in nature, and finding it difficult to connect with nature, as there were always people asking questions about where the staple gun was” (Graeme 2006).

The significance of the sustained nature of these relationships was brought home to me in a discussion much more recently. I was trying to describe the nature of my thesis to a group of Australian teachers in a social setting. I had been asked, somewhat incredulously: “How on earth can you actually have a relationship with land?” My reply was simply: “Live on it”, an answer which brought approval from the only indigenous Australian in the group, who treated this response as though it were common sense. Thinking about this afterwards, it seemed to me to be a legitimization of the discourse that, in some respects, the way of life at Landmatters is a form of indigenous living for the UK.

This relationship with the land is something that individuals can work to consciously deepen, and the key manner in which this occurs is the ritual practice of the community. Restall-Orr's statement that: "Ritual can guide us out of complacency, apathy and blinkered complicity, into a wakeful state of honourable living once more" (Restall Orr 2000b) is enacted in the ritual life of the community. Ollie's statement praising these rituals which "help people to feel a part of this place and connect to it in some way" (Ollie 2008) is a great place to start, as it acknowledges the purpose of the ritualising within the community (and from a position of scepticism). The fact that ritual, albeit very frequently in a 'light touch' manner, informs so much of life at Landmatters, from seasonal celebrations to daily work, private rituals, and even the joyful calling of "Blessings on the cook, blessings on the food!" at communal meals is a clear indication that there is a concerted effort to consciously deepen the relationships there. The creation of sacred spaces, or shrines within the community serves a similar function — a deliberate attempt to demonstrate the sacredness of place (see Figures 7.4, 7.5, 7.6, 7.7, 7.11). It is significant that place, land and nature here are understood very much in terms of the ecofeminist or animist approach; not as idealised generalisations, but as local, personal and specific. This important contrast is articulated by Smith who points out the importance of locality for the road-protest tradition:

Where the roads' advocates couch their arguments and tactics in abstract terms of economic utilitarianism and legal rights, the protesters emphasize the specific ecology and ethos of the locality they defend, its uniqueness, special qualities and associated traditions (M. Smith 2001, 163).

While these conclusions are fairly straightforward, the question of whether or not this constitutes evidence of an 'embodied ethic' is rather more complex. When discussing with my interviewees why they had chosen to live in the community (the decision that was, for all of them, the most concrete form of their ethical decision making and activity), there were a number of different ways of answering. Interestingly, the thing that nobody started by referring to were the obvious intellectual justifications for this kind of life. They may have mentioned these in passing, but all began by talking about their own experiences, their own immersion, and it was universally identified as a 'heart' decision, rather than a 'head' decision. Maren's explanation is a good example:

It's waking up in the morning and looking out (1) and being able to step outside, step onto the earth, being outdoors really (2). The whole weather scenario (3), being so close to what's going on — a day like this is obviously amazing, beautifully sunny, when it's windy you can feel it here (4), everything moving — just being so close to the elements I suppose (5) . In the evening we go to bed, and just look at the roof, which is all made from hazel, woven together, and just imagine being under the universe (6), and feel close to the earth — really grounded (7). And also knowing that it has a low environmental impact (8), rather than being in town where I just turn on the tap, and without thinking use up loads of water, and then just go and shit into the water (9). Here you step outside and have a pee, and it's okay (10). We heat for ourselves with wood that's from our wood or from the hedge so it's sustainable (11). We use our own generated power from solar

panels (12). Knowing that we have such a low impact on the environment is just great (13), and being on a mission to tell other people (14), to create something that we all believe in (15), that's a good feeling, apart from when we all get overwhelmed by the work! But generally it is really what I wanted to do (16) , and I'm really happy that I'm here. Being able to step outside and I've only started gardening this year (17) — first time I'm growing vegetables, and it's really amazing what you can grow, and you don't have to have an allotment like in town, I just step outside and there are my vegetables, I can just step out and pick something (18) , super-fresh, and just having seen all of these plants come out, with their different patterns and varieties, being able to experience that, right outside my door (19) . Growing stuff (Maren 2006).

In this section of interview, where Maren is telling the story of why it is important for her to be there, I've identified nineteen points that she makes, of which only five might be referred to as intellectual justifications for her way of life (such as number eight — 'Knowing that it [their lifestyle] has a low environmental impact'). However, fourteen of them are to do with relational and embodied justifications; about feeling, about experience, about 'being there'. A similar pattern emerged from the other interviews, where the primary justifications for their choices were firmly based in lived experience. While it is true that the 'head' reasons are important for the inhabitants at Landmatters, it is the 'heart' reasons that are the most important in forming and in strengthening their ethical decision making.

I think it is also significant to note that such an embodied ethic is, in the best tradition of Pagan thought, cyclic, rather than linear. What I mean here is to contrast between two ethical processes. The linear that uses conventional thought processes to reach a conclusion as to 'what is the right thing to do', and then do it, with a cyclic embodied process. Here an individual intuitively feels as to the 'right thing to do', begins doing it, and through the deepening of that reciprocal relationship, and an openness to this kind of ethical formation, experiences not merely a justification of the original intuition, but also a regular renaissance of that intuition, a deepening of the feeling, and a regular reiteration of the rightness of that particular path. Maren's comments above sum this up beautifully.

In conclusion, I have identified some important points that can be extracted from this ethnographic data which support the assertion that for many of the individuals, their prime ethical choice, that of living on the land in a low impact way, and of relating to the land in an 'I-Thou' relationship, are, in fact, evidence of an 'embodied ethic'. I believe that this provides us with a powerful way of understanding the way that these relationships are considered at Landmatters — that individuals do indeed move, through their embodied experiences, into a more mindful, explicit and closer relationship with the land, one that profoundly lives out the concept of honouring the land, not through words or ritual, but through their chosen lifestyles, through the hard work, and putting up with the not-inconsiderable discomforts of 'living out', and the complexities and demands of living in a hard-working community. The discourse of honouring the land is one that is common in Paganism, but all too often in its contemporary manifestation seems

to be a *shibboleth* — as evinced in the frequent complaints about litter and damaging ritual detritus (candle wax on stones, non-biodegradable offerings etc.) left by individuals performing ritual at sacred sites.¹² By comparison with this the lifestyle choices made by the community at Landmatters, to live on the land in a low-impact way, with all the difficulties and challenges that this presents, compounded by the challenges of a non-hierarchical and consensus-based community seem positively heroic in their dedication to walking the walk as well as talking the talk. Such a choice seems to make little intellectual sense to many in the modern world — indeed, as Rooh states: “I don’t think it’s just a head decision at all... I think it’s a heart decision” (Star 2006).

¹² The guidelines laid out at the ASLAN website give a clear indication of some of the damage caused by careless use of such sites; <http://people.bath.ac.uk/prsrlp/kernunos/kaslan2.htm>



Figure 7-1. Rooh's Bender — aligned on the four cardinal directions, exterior.



Figure 7-2. Rooh's Bender — aligned on the four cardinal directions, interior.

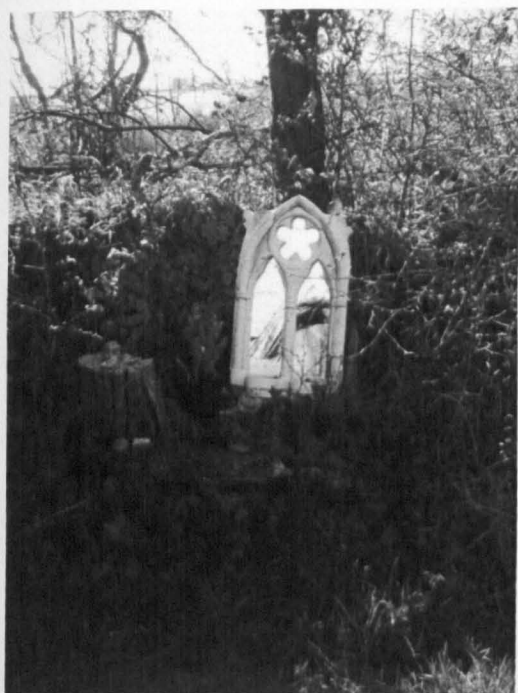


Figure 7-3. Rooh's Bender — shrine outside door.



Figure 7-4. Rooh's Bender — naturally occurring Algiz rune on door.



Figure 7-5. Shrine near Communal Bender.



Figure 7-6. Green Man honouring Nature Spirits.



Figure 7-7. Josh's Bender, Yurt and Veg Garden.



Figure 7-8. Maren and Brains' Bender.



Figure 7-9. The barn



Figure 7-10. Graeme and Emma's Bender.



Figure 7-11. Water Shrine — borehole and Pump in Background.

8.

Pagan Values Survey

In order to establish the extent to which the attitudes and behaviours of my interviewees, both at Landmatters and elsewhere, were normative for Pagans, and thus the extent to which the broader Pagan community might engage with an embodied approach to environmental ethics, I carried out an on-line survey. The Pagan Values Survey ran on-line for 16 months (from May 2007 to November 2008, with most responses in May and August 2007). It was designed as a simple on-line survey to measure the attitudes of Pagans to a number of specific ethical issues, broadly associated with attitudes and engagement to do with environmental issues. The sample of respondents was entirely self-selecting. The principal advertising was through two short articles in *Pagan Dawn* (the journal of the Pagan Federation), as well as through web-sites, blogs and e-lists. As it was made clear that this survey was focussed on environmental issues, and there was no attempt to specifically identify a sample group, it is likely that only those Pagans with an existing concern or interest in such an area responded — so there is a chance that the results are tilted slightly in a ‘pro-environmental’ direction.

Demographics

In total, 545 individuals completed the survey correctly (although a number of incomplete attempts were recorded — which I suspect may be to do with individuals using the browser buttons that they were accustomed to using, rather than following the specific instructions given for moving through the questionnaire). These 545 individuals came from a total of nineteen countries,

although the biggest group (245) were from the UK, and the second biggest (205) were from the US. Gender representation was mainly female (68%). They represent an age group covering from 14-65+, although the vast majority were aged between 25 — 45 (25-35 26% / 35-45 32%). Most respondents were well-educated (52% having at least an undergraduate qualification), and while there was a wide variety of employment, the largest employment groups were in education (11%) and healthcare (9.3%) although 42 individuals preferred not to say (but, as was pointed out to me in several emails, there was no category for 'home-maker', an interesting omission when considering that we were using what is regarded as an 'industry standard' list of employment types). 12 respondents identified themselves as living 'an alternative lifestyle'.

Pagan Identity

In terms of their identity as Pagans, most agreed strongly with the statement that 'My friends know that I'm Pagan' (37% strongly agree and 33% agree, giving an aggregate agreement of 70%), although this was lower for family members (31%SA and 25%A = Ag 46%), and markedly lower for work colleagues (15% SA, 28% A = 42% Ag).¹³ This suggests that most of my respondents were quite public about their Pagan identity. The majority of individuals (59%) identified themselves as Solitaries (that is Pagans whose worship and practice are conducted in isolation), while smaller but significant proportions worked with a close group of initiates (13%), or with family or friends (10%). 27% of respondents worked with others once a month

¹³ For convenience in future I will use the abbreviations; SA — strongly agree, A — agree, Ag — aggregate.

or more. The most common form of interaction with other Pagans, however, was on-line, and less than half of the sample took part in regular working groups (indeed 19% of respondents had never tried group ritual).

Unsurprisingly, an eclectic range of influences were reported by the group — and the most common (19%) was identified as 'Traditional Witchcraft'. I suspect that this high score is due to a misunderstanding of the way in which I was using the term. I had given respondents the choice of 'Alexandrian, Gardnerian, Reclaiming, Dianic, and 'Other' Wicca, and I assumed that it would be sufficiently obvious that 'Traditional Witchcraft' was intended to cover other specific areas — such as the Cochrane Tradition, Family Traditions, and the work of others like Robin Artisson. There are two possibilities here; either this is the way that my respondents read it as well, and I have just tapped into a particularly rich vein of this particular tradition, or that most respondents read it to mean some kind of generic Wiccan practice. The latter is substantially more likely, but unclear, so I will discount this particular figure in future. Other Pagan traditions that registered highly as influential were Shamanism, Eco-Paganism and Druidry, which would certainly support the idea that individuals choosing to complete this questionnaire were from the more environmental end of the scale, and indeed Druidry had the highest representation from respondents who described themselves as initiates (81 respondents).

It was clear that respondents' Pagan identity was frequently understood and articulated explicitly in relation to the environment. The vast majority (54% SA and 37% A = 91% Ag) of respondents agreed with the statement that 'I am often aware

of the spirit of place when I am in particular locations', and similar numbers claimed that they 'feel a very close sense of connection to the land' (62% SA and 33% A = 95% Ag). This was also borne out in preferences for Pagan activities, with a large majority (43% SA and 37%A = 80% Ag) stating that they preferred to 'celebrate festivals, perform rituals, in the outdoors'. Nearly all respondents strongly agreed that they find 'the experience of being out in nature can be profoundly moving', (85% SA and 14% A = 99% Ag), and 81% specifically related these experiences to their spirituality.

There was a strong sense that Pagans should be engaged in inter-faith dialogue, but this sits at odds with the level of engagement that respondents actually report (231 stated that they strongly agreed that inter-faith dialogue was important, but only 18 strongly agreed that this was something that they did regularly). Embodiment may well be an issue here. From my own experience of working with Pagans, and engaging in inter-faith dialogue as a Pagan, it can be very difficult to explain to non-Pagans 'What Paganism is about' — there are no simple statements of belief, or creeds that may simply be explained. This means that inter-faith dialogue often seems very difficult for the Pagan, as they have to translate their personal experience of the profound spiritual value of nature into the theological terms that may be understood by those with whom they are engaging.

Embodiment

In order to establish the extent to which Paganism might be said to be an embodied spirituality, I included a question on the kinds of physical activities which Pagans might identify as positively influencing their spirituality (Figure 8.1). The data gathered from this question would tend to support the position that the embodied practice is extremely significant in the spiritual development of Pagan practitioners. Of those activities, where a large number identified a 'great impact' upon their spiritual development, the experience of natural beauty, country walks, individual ritual, meditation, and visiting sacred sites were the areas that were most significant. Other possibilities scored less highly, but I think that it is significant that all areas (even surfing) managed to attract some individuals who claimed a great impact from the experience. This reflects a similar picture to that established by Harris (2008), whose research also identified meditation, the organic environment, Ritual/Dancing and sex as particular processes by which Pagans might connect with the body. Harris also found yoga, sport or martial arts were not common, although one key difference was that his respondents were not as particularly moved by visiting Sacred Sites. One unresolved issue with both these pieces of research is that there is no particular clarity as to what is understood by 'meditation', and there might well be considerable differences of opinion over the extent to which this is an inherently 'embodied' activity. While it might be perfectly possible to view a meditation practice based upon Yoga asanas or pranayama as embodied, imaginative meditations (commonly referred to in Paganism as 'path-working') might be harder to justify as 'embodied'.

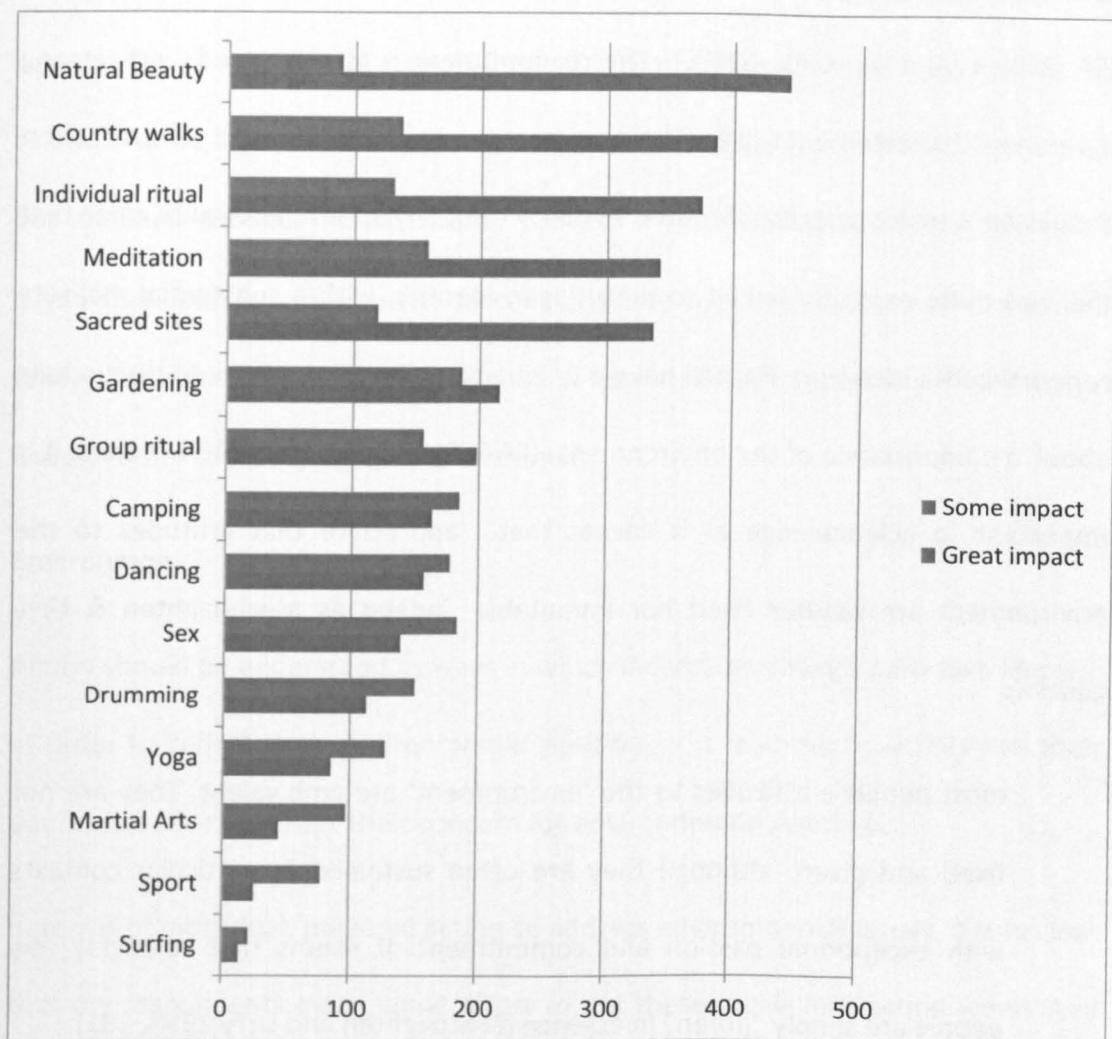


Figure 8-1. Impact of Embodied Activities.

Meditation in the sense of consciously sitting quietly or ‘sitting out’ as a way of opening to the surrounding world, which is certainly the kind of meditational activity encountered most frequently at Landmatters, could certainly be counted as an embodied activity, as it is a way of attuning the self, and opening up to a broader sense of relationship.

Environment — Attitudes

There was a consistently strong identification amongst respondents as people who cared passionately about the environment. A majority of respondents claimed that

their friends would 'describe them as someone committed to environmental issues' (SA 22% + A 47% = Ag 69%). This commitment was expressed with strong agreement to statements like: 'The environment is important, and its protection should be a major priority' (SA 60% + A 34% = Ag 94%). It is also quite clear that this was quite explicitly linked to their Pagan identity, with a substantial majority supporting the idea that 'Pagans have a unique contribution to make to discussions about the importance of the environment' (SA 39% + A 42% = Ag 81%). I think it is important to acknowledge as a caveat that I appreciate that attitudes to the environment are neither fixed nor immutable, indeed as Macnaghten & Urry caution:

most people's attitudes to the 'environment' are ambivalent. They are not fixed and given, although they are often sustained in particular contexts with exceptional passion and commitment. It seems that relatively few people are simply "green" in essence (Macnaghten and Urry 1998, 251).

There appears to be a considerable willingness to make sacrifices in order to address specific environmental issues. 56% of respondents, for example would be willing to accept a reduction in their standard of living in order to provide clean drinking water for everyone, and 57% for climate change.

Respondents appear to have a strong sense of the importance of environmental issues. 29% of respondents strongly agreed with the statement: 'I would give part of my income if I were certain that the money would be used to prevent environmental pollution'. A similarly rosy comparison also exists in relation to the

statement: 'I would agree to an increase in taxes if the extra money were used to prevent environmental pollution', where 30% of my respondents strongly agree. In relation to the statement: 'The Government has to reduce environmental pollution, but it should not cost me any money', 35% of my respondents strongly disagreed. Given this data, it is reasonable to conclude that my respondents are inclined to recognise the need for individual effort and responsibility to address environmental issues, rather than relying upon government.

Environment — Action

Action should be understood as ways in which individuals change their own lifestyle in order to reflect their environmental position — it is about how they live their day-to-day lives to reflect their concern for environmental interests.

In terms of individual, personal action to address environmental issues, it was clear that my respondents made some effort to put these ideals into action when they were shopping. Most made an effort to buy recycled paper products (SA 27% + A 47% = Ag 74%), and to try to buy products with little packaging (SA 28%, A49% = Ag 77%), as well as trying to ensure that any wood products that they buy come from sustainable resources (SA 21% + A 42% = Ag 63%). Similarly high figures were obvious for buying environmentally friendly products (regularly 50%, often 32% = Ag 82%), using low energy light bulbs (R56% + O22% = Ag 78%), recycling (R77% + O13% = Ag 90%) and composting (R38% + O 13% = Ag 51%), although figures were lower for getting involved in cleaning up sacred sites or beaches/forests, using public transport, or car-sharing. These figures seem to be broadly in line with those

that Machnaghten & Urry identified as normative from the MORI UK 'Green Consumer' study:

In 1994, it was found that 66% of the British public now buy 'ozone friendly' aerosols, 52% buy products made from recycled packaging, 52% regularly choose products that have not been tested on animals and 44% regularly use a bottle bank (Macnaghten and Urry 1998, 83).

Questions about support for specific environmental organisations prompted responses that demonstrated the geographical limitations of my questions. Most respondents had never heard of some of these organisations, although what was interesting was the explicit rejection by some of some well-known, high-profile, international organisations. 79 individuals (15%) stated that they would be uncomfortable supporting Greenpeace.

Environment — Activism

Activism should be understood as choices that individuals make to prioritise actions that might have a specific environmental impact. It should be understood as looking outwards, making an effort to influence others and the world around them. Prior work on Pagan engagement in activism has suggested that it is comparatively uncommon. Davey's survey of environmental activism comments that: "Although Pagan discourses tend to support environmentalism, perhaps the average Pagan does not tend so much toward political action" (Davey 2002, 92), but she suggests a reason for this when she states that: "this may be simply because it [activism] is something that one does, rather than writes about" (Davey 2002, 91). Oboler also

argues that: "Statistically Pagans are more likely to take environmentalist positions and actions and engage in environmentally sound lifestyle practices" (Oboler 2004, 104). The levels of activism recorded in this survey suggest that Davey's justification is rather optimistic, and that Oboler's argument is weak, as the largest percentages recorded by respondents usually indicate that respondents get involved 'sometimes', rather than 'regularly' or 'often' (Figure 8.2). Another contributing factor may be the perceived powerlessness that Pagans experience in relation to the establishment. Machnaghten and Urry "found evidence of ambivalent attitudes towards personal action, related to a pervasive lack of personal agency and a marked lack of trust in institutions responsible for managing environmental change" (Macnaghten and Urry 1998, 246). If this feeling that there is no point in getting engaged with a system that ignores or excludes you, and whom you don't trust anyway is true for the majority of people, then it is even more likely to be true for Pagans who see themselves as substantially excluded or ignored to begin with.

In the context of environmental issues, have you ever:

■ Never ■ Rarely ■ Sometimes ■ Often ■ Regularly

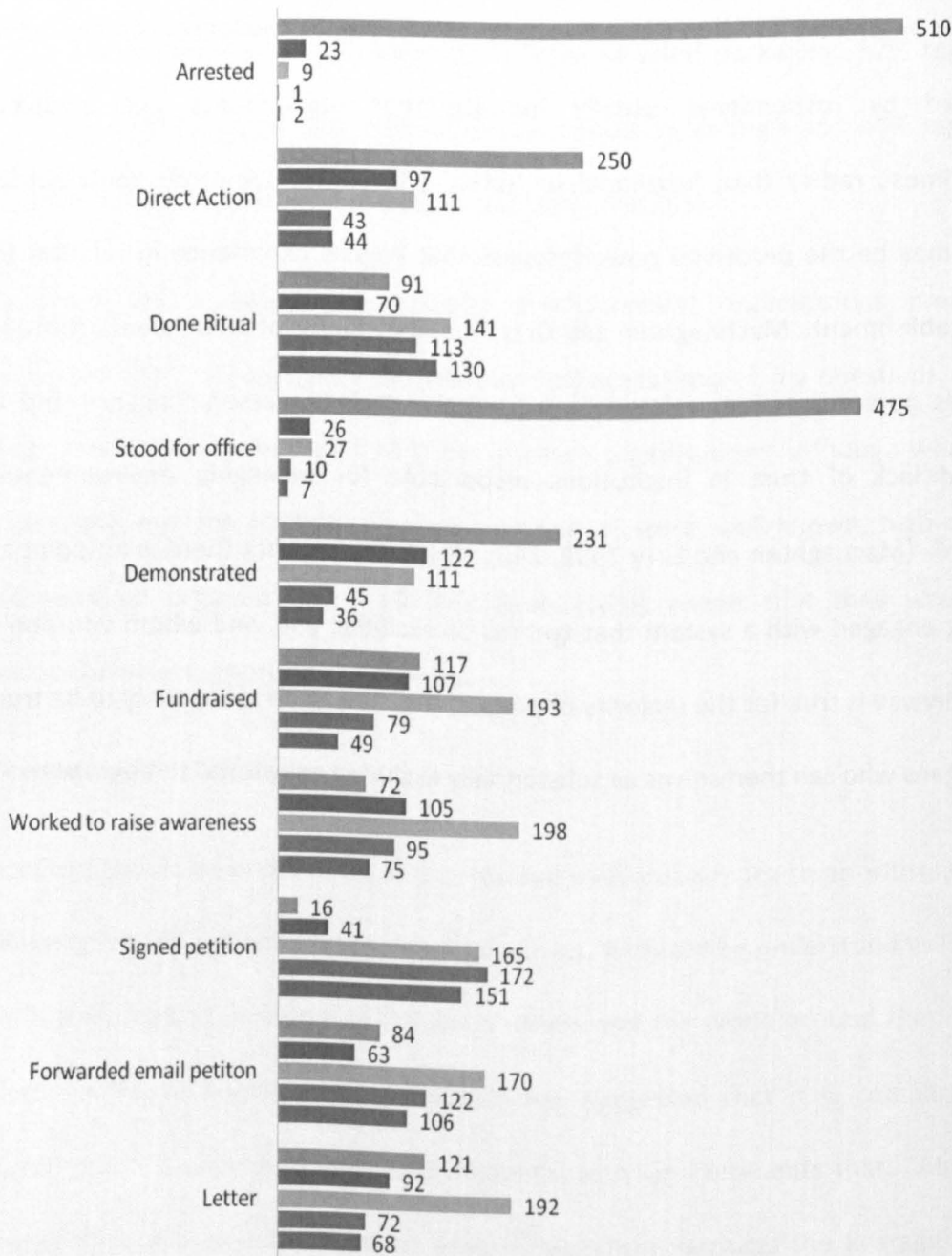


Figure 8-2. Activism in response to Environmental issues.

If we were to separate these into three categories — the first being ‘supporting activism’ as opposed to direct personal involvement, the level of engagement is much lower. Only a quarter of respondents have regularly or often written a letter of protest (35% sometimes and 22% never), and a similar picture emerges for both forwarding an email petition (42% regularly and often, 31% sometimes, 15% never), although it is slightly better for signing a petition (60% regularly and often, 30% sometimes).

The second category of ‘involved in activism’ represents a step into more active engagement. Here 36% have ‘sometimes’ worked to raise awareness about an issue, although 31% have been more involved. The picture for fundraising is similar, with 35% having done so ‘sometimes’ (although 21% never). Demonstrating is even less popular, with 42% never having done it, and only 20% having done it sometimes.

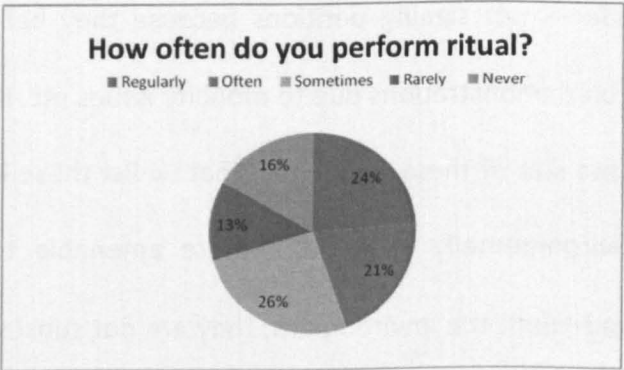


Figure 8-3. Ritual in response to Environmental issues.

A more explicitly 'Pagan' part of this category is doing ritual for a particular environmental reason, and here the picture demonstrates a greater degree of engagement with environmental issues (Figure 8.3).

The final category of 'committed activism' is more notable for the high numbers selecting the 'never' category — 87% have never stood for office, 46% have never taken part in direct action (which combines with 18% rarely), and 94% have never been arrested. The final point above was one that aroused a good deal of feedback from the questionnaire, as it was seen to imply a particular, confrontational approach being normative for Pagans. This was not my intention, but at the same time it was important to be able to recognise those three individuals whose commitment had extended to doing that regularly or often (just as it was important to allow those whose spirituality had been informed by surfing).

It is important to note that there was no way for respondents to explain the choices that they had made — not signing petitions because they believed them to be useless, not going on demonstrations due to mobility issues etc. It is, however, safe to conclude from the size of these responses, that whilst these Pagans as a whole may be more environmentally aware and more amenable to possible future sacrifice in order to benefit the environment, they are not substantially more likely to translate this into activism.

Political attitudes

There are a number of underlying attitudes that I think might be germane to discussions of the political and global engagement that are demonstrated in the

research. Firstly there is an overwhelming agreement with the statement: 'I believe that we all have a responsibility to make society fairer' (SA 42% + A 48% = Ag 90%). I suggest that this is an important marker to which we should return in further discussions. Also of interest is the comparison between the relative importance of freedom and equality. Here my respondents had more warm support for the idea that freedom is more important. I suggest that this ties in tightly with some other points noted earlier, about Pagans being very resistant towards control or blindly following — as I have noted there seems to be a considerable natural independence inherent amongst this group.

Political engagement

As one of the questions in the environment section indicates, one might fairly expect a degree of Pagan engagement with politics as a way of driving forward an environmental agenda. A good, if rare, example of such an approach might be that of Andrew Brennand, a member of OBOD, who is also a Green Party member and election agent in Lancaster. He is involved with a Community Orchard, and his local Residents' Association. The motivation for this engagement arises from his understanding of Druid ideas of Service (Brennand 2007). He regards working on the allotment and in the Orchard— even tedious meetings about elections, and the process of getting planning permission for a wind turbine on his house, as part of his spiritual practice. He states that the thing that makes these actions Pagan is their intent. Working with intent creates an interior aspect that makes things different — 'it is the intention that makes the action'. The overall figures, though, (Figure 8.4) suggest that this is not a normative approach. There seems to be a considerable tension amongst my respondents between suggesting that their own spiritual path has a substantial influence upon their own political stance and suggesting that this kind of religious influence upon politics is not a healthy thing. For example, in response to the suggestion that: 'My spiritual path and my beliefs have a big impact upon the way that I think about politics', 83% of respondents agreed or agreed strongly, yet in response to the suggestion that 'Politics and spiritual matters are quite separate, and it is always wrong to allow them to effect one another', 51% disagreed or disagreed strongly. Such a disinclination to explicitly identify politically as a Pagan was also underlined by the lack of agreement with 'I

have been inspired to political activism by my spiritual path/beliefs' (SA 9% + A 25% = Ag 34%). A likely cause here is the tension between equality and freedom mentioned above. My respondents appear to be more likely to adopt a *laissez faire*, or libertarian approach, rather than an interventionist or liberal approach. Part of this, I suggest, is made clearer by the overwhelming agreement with the statement that 'Religious leaders should not influence how people vote in elections', where 70% agreed or agreed strongly. I would suggest that part of the issue here is a common Pagan antipathy to seeing themselves as part of an 'organised religion'. For many Pagans it is the individual freedom and lack of orthodoxy that attracts them, and consequently there is a tendency to reject those who seek to organise or represent a 'Pagan' point of view. The often-repeated saw that 'organising Pagans is like herding cats' demonstrates that this challenge is recognised within the community. The antipathy towards organisations that are by any measure potentially beneficial to Pagans in general, such as Pebble in the UK may be another facet of this.¹⁴

¹⁴ Public Body Liaison Committee for British Paganism (<http://www.pebble.uk.net/index.html>)

In the context of political issues, have you ever:

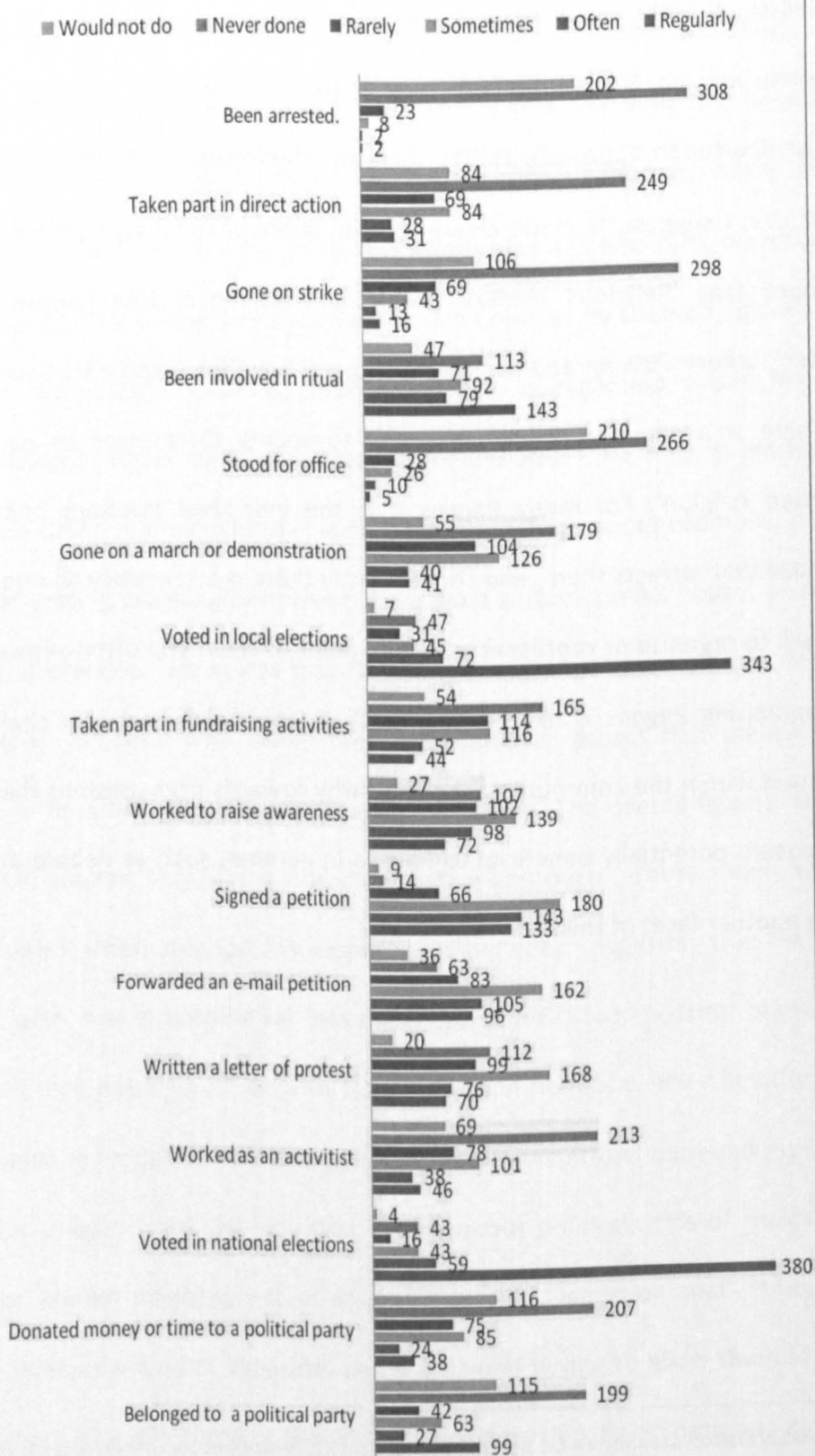


Figure 8-4. Activism in response to Political issues.

Thus it is unsurprising to find seemingly contradictory data in this survey — such as the large scale support for Pagan involvement in local politics (71% Ag), and the acceptance that Pagans have a unique contribution to make (76% Ag), contrasting with the figures for those who have stood for office, and the agreement with the statement ‘Political activism is not an important part of life’, where 34% disagreed or disagreed strongly.

Respondents, however, were much more interested in larger scale politics — most said that they had voted for a candidate based upon their attitude to the

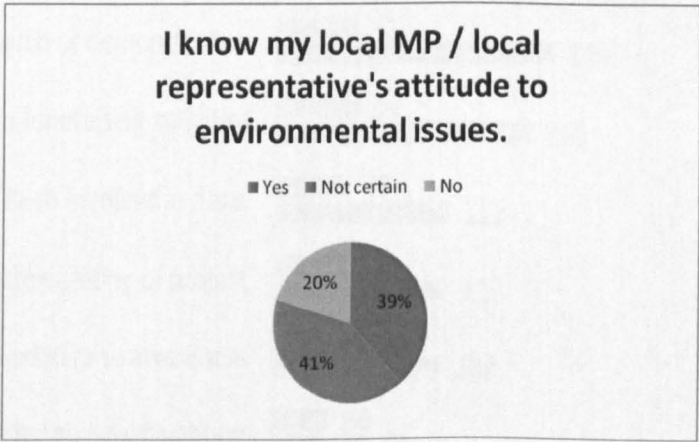


Figure 8-5. Knowledge of Local representative’s stance on Environmental issues.

environment (SA37% + A 43% = Ag 80%), although the level of certainty about their local representative’s stance on the environment was less straightforward (Figure 8.5). It was also notable that, out of a selection of different issues that might be important in identifying a candidate to vote for, by far the largest group suggested that the environment was ‘of great importance’ (71%). When looking at a range of possible engagements with politics, the two that stand out as being overwhelmingly positive are ‘voting in national elections’ (69% did so regularly), and in ‘local elections’ (63% did so regularly). In terms of more direct personal engagement with

political processes, the other end of the scale was more notable. Here (Figure 8.6) one can see continuing evidence of an unwillingness to be organised, or to explicitly identify as joining with others — notably in the fact that 57% have never, or would not ever, join a political party (although it has to be recognised that by comparison with the general public’s membership of political parties, this is quite a high figure). Given these levels of engagement, it hardly seems surprising that the vast majority agreed that ‘the political establishment does not take Paganism seriously’ (SA 46% + A 42% = Ag 88%).

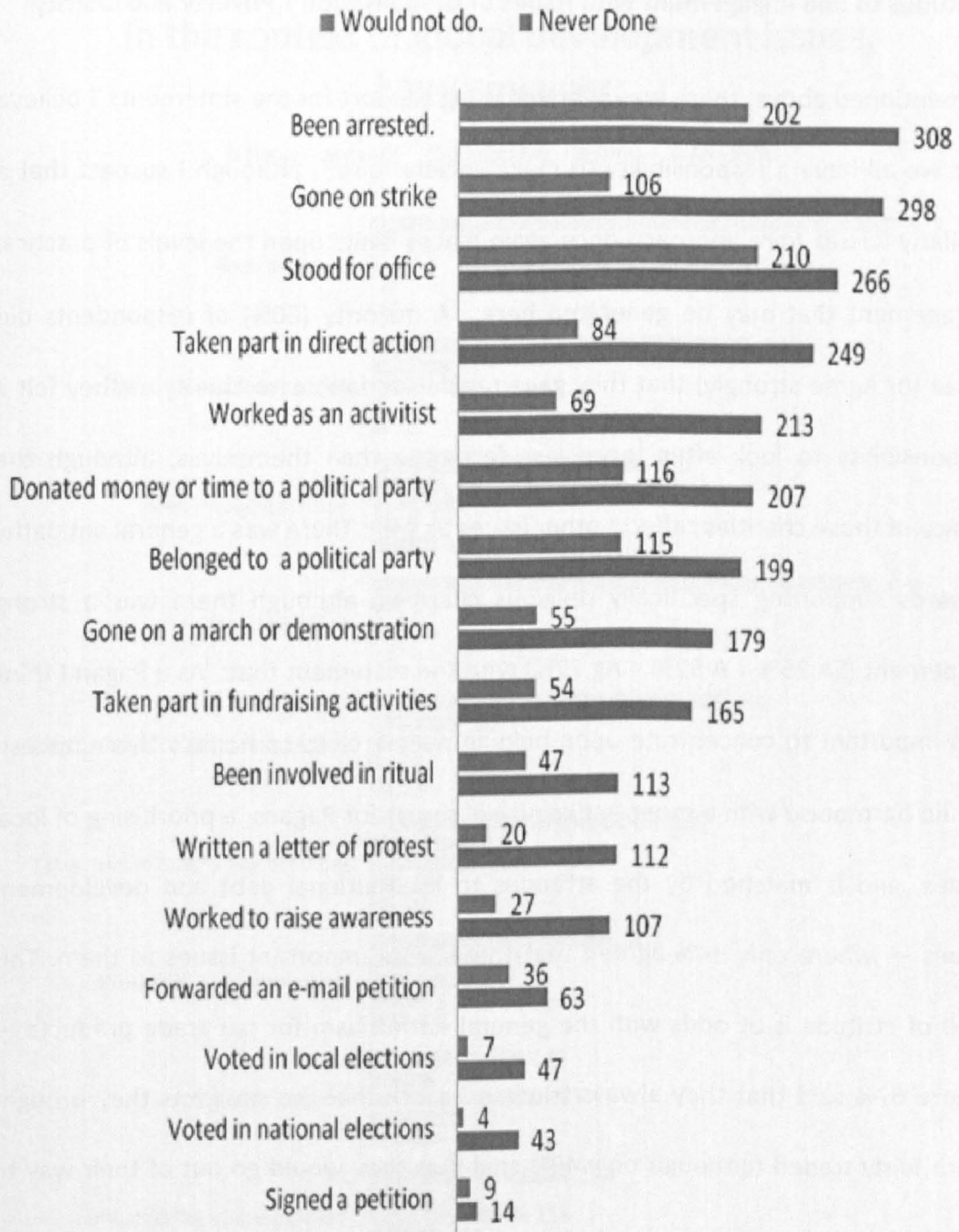


Figure 8-6. Unwillingness to engage in particular political activities.

Attitudes to and engagement with Issues of Globalisation / Poverty and Charity

As mentioned above, there was overwhelming support for the statement: 'I believe that we all have a responsibility to make society fairer', although I suspect that a similarly *laissez faire* approach once again places limits upon the levels of practical engagement that may be generated here. A majority (60%) of respondents did agree (or agree strongly) that they gave regular donations to charity as they felt a responsibility to look after those less fortunate than themselves, although the choice of those charities reflects other issues as well. There was a general antipathy towards supporting specifically religious charities, although there was a strong agreement (SA 25% + A 52% = Ag 77%) with the statement that: 'As a Pagan I think it is important to concentrate upon helping people close to home'. This emphasis would harmonise with a more 'indigenising' thrust for Pagans, a prioritising of local issues, and is matched by the attitudes to international debt and development issues — where only 34% agreed that these were important issues to them. This kind of attitude is at odds with the general enthusiasm for fair trade products — where 67% said that they always tried to ensure that the products they brought were fairly traded (although only 49% said that they would go out of their way to buy them).

In the context of global development issues, have you ever:

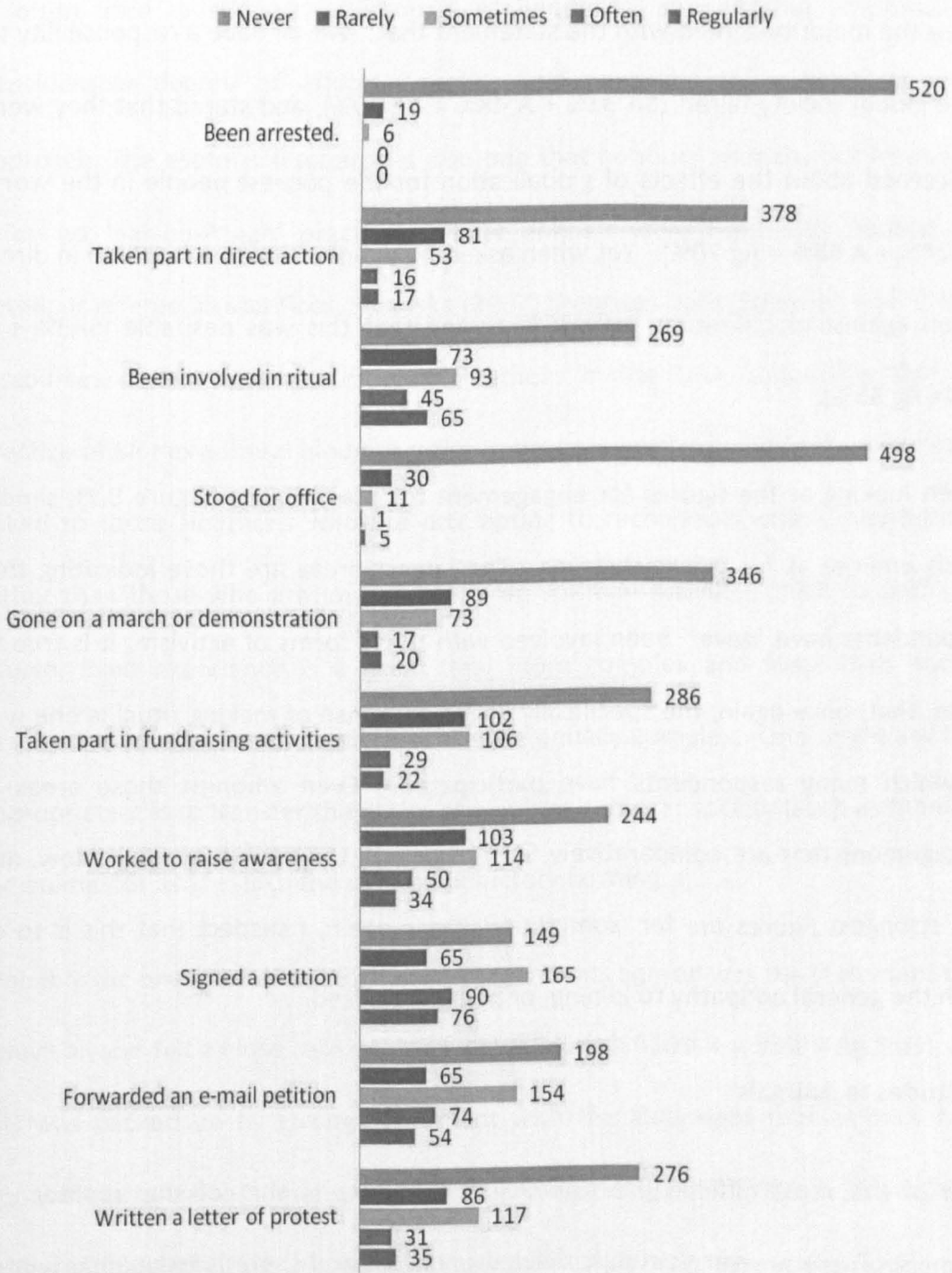


Figure 8-7. Activism in relation to Global Issues.

Activism and Issues of Globalisation and Poverty

There is a notable tension between more general attitudes to injustice in the world, where the majority agreed with the statement that: 'We all have a responsibility to make global society fairer' (SA 31% + A 48% = Ag 79%), and stated that they were 'concerned about the effects of globalisation for the poorest people in the world' (SA 24% + A 48% = Ag 70%). Yet when asked if Pagans should be involved in direct action against globalisation, only 35% agreed that this was desirable (SA 9% + A 26% = Ag 35%).

When looking at the figures for engagement for these issues (Figure 8.7), similar levels emerge as for previous issues. The largest areas are those indicating that respondents have 'never' been involved with these forms of activism. It is true to state, that, once again, the specifically Pagan response of making ritual is one way in which many respondents have participated. Even amongst those areas of engagement that are comparatively 'non-engaged', the figures are quite low, and the strongest figures are for 'sometimes'. Once again, I suspect that this is to do with the general antipathy to joining, or being organised.

Attitudes to Animals

One of the most difficult areas in Pagan discourse is that of the approach to animals. There are very strongly divided opinions, and there is frequently heated debate. While the majority of Pagans agree that animals should be honoured, and would certainly not treat them in a reductive, scientific manner, there is a strong dichotomy in attitudes to eating animals. The split between meat eaters and

vegetarians in Paganism is one area that could potentially map nicely onto the two different discourses of nature — the esoteric and the animist. The animist discourse is often used to support a discourse of honouring animals that emphasises a considerable degree of ethical equality, and consequently a non-flesh-eating approach. The esoteric discourse is also one that honours animals, but frequently refers to ‘palaeo-Pagan’ practices, where animals were frequently hunted and eaten, or offered as sacrifices. Strmiska (2007) theorises both ‘Spiritual’ and ‘Ethnic’ discourses of *blót* amongst modern Heathens in the USA, suggesting that the practice of *blót* as a literal blood sacrifice in the contemporary world is more closely linked to those Heathens who are attempting to reconstruct ethnic heathenism, rather than those who are involved in more spiritual activities (such as *seiðr*). Of course, lived experience is a great deal more complex and fuzzy than such a description would suggest, but the ethics are equally complex. One might ask how appropriate it is to transfer the ethics of a hunter gatherer society (such as thanking the animal for its life) into the context of factory farming.

Probably the one area with which most respondents agreed was the statement that ‘I have always felt a close relationship with animals’ (SA50% + A 35% = Ag 85%), and this was backed up by strong agreement with the statement that animals have ‘equal importance to humans, as conscious living beings’ (SA40% + A 36% = 76%). The way in which this influenced Pagan spirituality was also clear, with most respondents (SA40% + A 39% = Ag 79%) agreeing that they honour animals/animal spirits as part of their practices, and there was also clear agreement that ‘Animals have a spiritual component’ (SA44% + A 47% = Ag 91%). Such strong relationship

and recognition of spiritual importance did not translate into conventional markers of support for animal rights. Fewer respondents were happier agreeing that there was a need for animals in medical experiments (here only SA27% +A19% = Ag 46%), and similar figures support the necessity for Pagans to be involved in direct action for animal rights (SA15% + A 31% = Ag 46%). On the key question about the comparative value of humans and animals (figure 8.8), amongst those who expressed a preference (as most selected a middle position), there was a narrow agreement that humans were not more important than animals.

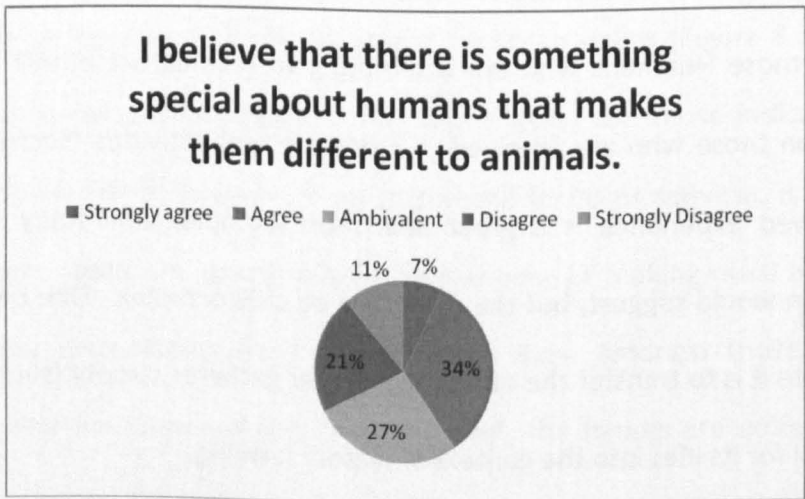


Figure 8-8. “There is something special about Humans that makes them different to Animals”

I did ask a question about fox hunting in the UK, and whether or not it was important for Pagans to be involved in sabotaging hunts, but the responses may well have been slanted by cultural factors (attitudes to hunting amongst Pagans in the US are often very different), but the general picture seemed to be that, while fox hunting was generally disapproved of, hunt sabotage was not something in which Pagans should be involved.

Eating Animals

When it came to matters surrounding eating animals, there was a clear split between the majority (80%) who did eat meat, and the minority who did not — at this juncture there were some specific questions for each set of attitudes.

Non-Meat Eaters (109 / 20%)

It was clear that a majority of this group related their choice to their spirituality — most (SA 38% + A24% = Ag 62%) agreed that they did not eat meat as they felt a strong, spiritual link to animals, and there was some agreement that vegetarianism is a more spiritually beneficial way of life (SA 21% + A 28% = Ag 49%). It was also clear that these attitudes are also complex, as comparatively few stated that not eating meat was important in order to maintain close relationships with animal persons/spirits (SA 22% + A 14% = Ag 36%). There were very few who agreed that they had special spiritual reasons for not eating meat that non-Pagans would not share (SA 13% + A 16% = Ag 29%). There was, however, considerable disagreement with the idea that Pagans should be vegetarian (strongly disagree 14% + disagree 42% = Ag 53%).

Meat Eaters (436 / 80%)

Amongst the meat eaters, there was considerable enthusiasm for buying meat raised with high standards of animal welfare (SA22% + A 37% = Ag 59%), and there was a clear acceptance of the financial implications of such a decision, where the majority agreed that they would spend more money on meat from animals that have been well cared for (SA 34% + A 46% = Ag 79%).

All respondents

There was very little agreement with the proposal that vegetarianism was spiritually beneficial (SA 8% + A 12% = Ag 20%), although this was also the case for the statement that Pagans should follow the lifestyle of their ancestors, including eating meat (SA 7% + A 22% = Ag 29%), and a strong rejection of the suggestion that eating meat might disrupt relationships with spirits (SD 26% + D 43% = Ag 69%).

Engagement with Issues of Animal Rights and Compassionate Farming

This is another area where the casual observer (and indeed some Pagan authors) might expect Pagans to be deeply involved. The picture suggested by the respondents (Figure 8.9), however, in common with the other sections on activism, suggests that instead, this is something where only a minority get involved, although, as previously noted, this tends to be in a 'light touch', non-confrontational way. Where respondents have engaged with these issues, they tend to be in ways that require comparatively little personal engagement or effort, although, as previously noted, the survey did not allow respondents to explain why, so low opinions of the success of petitions, or mobility issues may have been a feature for some. It is, once again, noteworthy to consider the most specific Pagan response to issues, that of ritual, but in this instance the majority have never applied ritual to these situations (never 54%, rarely 11% - Ag 65%).

In the context of issues to do with animal rights and compassionate farming, have you ever:

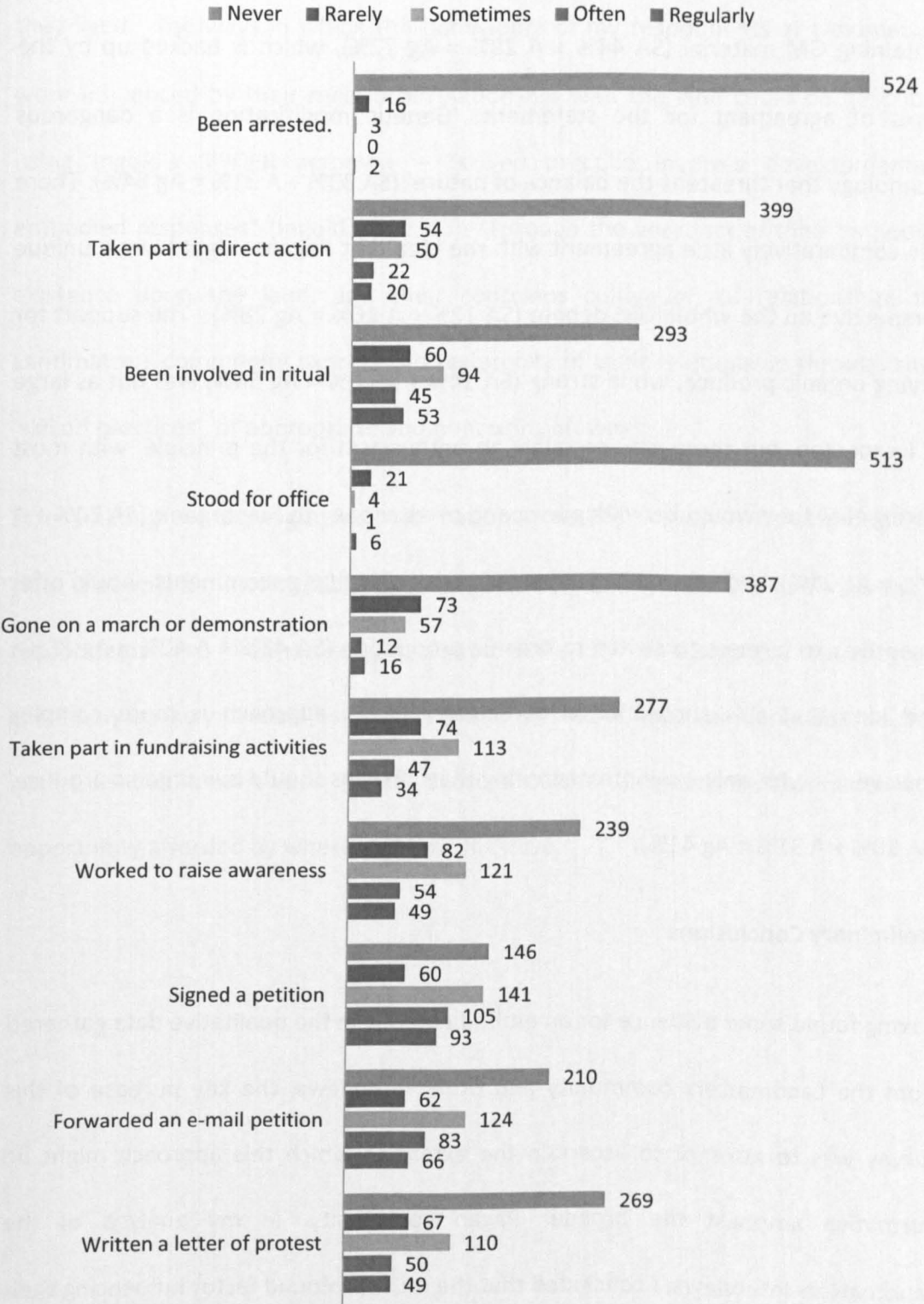


Figure 8-8 Activism in relation to animal rights and compassionate farming.

Attitudes to Genetic Modification and Organic Produce

This was the one area of the entire survey where there was substantial agreement from most respondents, most stating that they tried to avoid buying products containing GM material (SA 44% + A 28% = Ag 72%), which is backed up by the levels of agreement for the statement: 'Genetic modification is a dangerous technology that threatens the balance of nature' (SA 33% + A 31% = Ag 64%). There was comparatively little agreement with the idea that Pagans might have a unique perspective on the whole GM debate (SA 12% + A 16% = Ag 28%). The support for buying organic produce, while strong (SA 14% + A 40% = Ag 54%) was not as large as I expected, but there was certainly an enthusiasm for the principle, with most stating that they would be willing to spend more money to buy organic (SA 24% + A 47% = Ag 71%), and very strong support for the idea that governments should offer incentives to farmers to switch to organic production (SA 43% + A 42% = Ag 85%). The idea that this should be a particularly Pagan approach is more complex however — with only a minority agreeing that: 'Pagans should buy organic produce' (SA 10% + A 31% = Ag 41%),

Preliminary Conclusions

Having found some evidence for an embodied ethic in the qualitative data gathered from the Landmatters community and other interviews, the key purpose of this survey was to attempt to ascertain the extent to which this approach might be normative amongst the broader Pagan community. In my analysis of the Landmatters interviews, I concluded that the most profound factor influencing their

embodied ethic was the simple fact of their lifestyle — that they chose to live out on the land in low-impact structures, close to nature, and that this was the key factor that allowed them to develop the profound relationship with the land where they lived. The ways in which the behaviours of my respondents at Landmatters were influenced by their reciprocal relationship with the land could be described using Ingold's SPIDER acronym – “skilled practice involves developmentally embodied responses” (Ingold 2011, 65). Through the very fact of their embodied existence upon the land, and their conscious cultivation of relationship, the Landmatters community express the reciprocity of their relationship through their ‘skilled practices’, or appropriate and honouring lifeways.

In examining the demographic information from the survey, it quickly becomes clear that only a minority (22%) live in rural locations (Figure 8.10). The majority of respondents lived in either a city or a suburb of a city. This suggests that they are extremely unlikely to manifest exactly the same kind of deep relational approach to nature as the interviewees, purely because of the difference in experience and opportunity afforded by where and how they live.

Best description of home

■ Secluded rural ■ Small rural community ■ Small town
■ Suburb ■ Large town ■ City

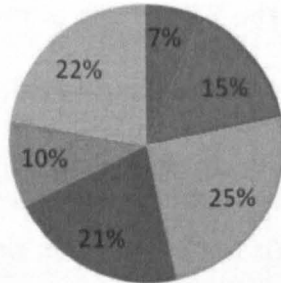


Figure 8-10. Best description of home

To return to the analogy of the different kinds of relationship that I explored at the end of the chapter six, respondents are unlikely to be able to enjoy the same depth of relationship with nature as my interviewees. When considering the two major areas that might suggest an embodied approach to their spirituality — ‘Country Walks’ and ‘Natural Beauty’ (Figure 8.1) — while this does involve interaction and the development of a relationship with nature, it is not the same kind of profound, sustained immersion that I considered in the previous chapter. Leopold identified this lack of opportunity for immersive relationship as:

the most serious obstacle impeding the evolution of a land ethic... Your true modern is separated from the land by many middlemen and by innumerable physical gadgets. He has no vital relation to it; to him it is the space between cities on which crops grow... in short land is something he has “outgrown” (Leopold 2001, 223-4).

In fact, as Abram suggests, this lack of opportunity for an embodied relationship with land sums up precisely the disjunction between our experience of nature and the way that we think about or articulate it, a disjunction that he identifies as: “divorcing these many teachings from the living land that once held and embodied these teachings” (Abram 2010, 281). Smith delineates the key difference here, when contrasting the different ways that groups talk about nature. He describes how members of the road protest movement: “emphasize the specific ecology and ethos of the locality they defend, its uniqueness, special qualities and associated traditions” (Smith 2001, 163). This emphasis is also one that resonates strongly with Plumwood’s ecofeminism, which also insists upon the importance of the local when thinking about reciprocal relationship with nature. Plumwood praises the:

deep and highly particularistic attachment to place that has motivated both the passion of many modern conservationists and the love of many indigenous peoples for their land... This is based not on a vague, bloodless and abstract cosmological concern, but on the formation of identify, social and personal in relation to particular areas of land, yielding ties often as special and powerful as those to kin, and which are clearly expressed in very specific and local responsibilities of care (Plumwood 2000, 268).

This intensity of relationship, which is the experience of many of the Landmatters respondents means that we are not really comparing ‘like with like’; such an intense and particular relationship with nature is not normative, and it is this lifestyle choice that has such an impact upon the depth of engagement.

In considering the extent to which embodied activity is important for Pagan spirituality, it is clear that the experience of the natural world is something that has a strong impact upon the majority of respondents, and that many have also had experience of a number of embodied activities that have brought about spiritual development. There was very powerful agreement with the statement that: 'I find the experience of being out in nature can be profoundly moving' (SA 83%), the vast majority of respondents were also keen to celebrate festivals and perform rituals outdoors (SA 43%, A 37%, Ag 80%), and a very large majority felt 'a very close sense of connection to the land' (SA 62%, A 33% Ag 95%), and suggested that they were 'often aware of the spirit of place when I am in particular locations (SA 54%, A 37%, Ag 91%). There is considerable resonance here with the pattern that I found in the qualitative data — where relationship with nature was of enormous significance specifically in relation to spirituality, and where this was consciously deepened through a number of specific activities, notably ritual. The importance of ritual is also evident in the quantitative data, with the majority of respondents identifying it as having had either 'some' or 'great' impact upon their spiritual development.

The fact that the figures for individual ritual (figure 8.11) were so much greater than for group ritual (figure 8.1) are very likely to be related to the fact that the majority of respondents identified themselves as being solitary practitioners.

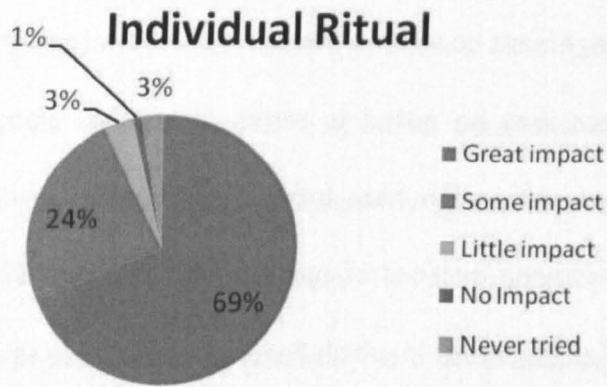


Figure 8-11. Impact of Individual Ritual

Respondents' attitudes to the environment also seemed to demonstrate a similarity with the kinds of attitudes espoused at Landmatters. It was certainly true that respondents demonstrated a high degree of concern for the environment, often explicitly connected to their self-identification as Pagan. There was strong agreement (SA 22%, A 47% Ag 69%) that 'most of my friends would describe me as someone committed to environmental issues'. There was (for high-profile issues like climate change and clean water) considerable willingness to make sacrifices (in the sense of accept a reduction in their standard of living to address the issue). It would be reasonable to anticipate from these responses a similarly strong commitment to positive engagement with these issues, and a degree of activism, but this was not borne out by the data. While many participants regularly recycled and used green products and low energy bulbs, other areas of engagement were less popular. The two areas of activism which had received the most regular support were signing a petition (28% regularly and 32% often — an aggregate of 60%), and performing ritual (where 24% had done so regularly, and 21 % often — an aggregate of 45%). Other kinds of engagement were limited to comparatively few individuals (See figure 8.2). This difference between the stated attitudes and

the levels of engagement continues throughout other areas of the survey as well — similar differences may be noted in terms of politics, global issues, and animal rights; the notable exception here being the whole issue of ritual performance, which, while of varying degrees of participation (figure 8.12), consistently stands out as a form of engagement in which Pagans are happy to take part.

%	Regularly	Often	Aggregate
Environment	24	21	45
Politics	26	14	40
Global Issues	12	8	20
Animal Rights	10	8	18

Figure 8-12. Ritual Performance for various issues.

Another point of resonance with the Landmatters approach is the emphasis upon personal freedom in the responses related to politics. I used a question from the European Social Values Survey which sought response to two statements comparing the relative merits of equality and freedom. The European aggregate responses for these questions demonstrated a greater concern for social equality, but my respondents’ overwhelming concern was personal freedom (Ag 65% for freedom, 33% for equality), which may also reflect a particular commonality amongst Pagans. I have noted elsewhere the resistance amongst Pagans to joining groups, or being led, and the responses to this question demonstrate a similarly independent attitude.

The picture that emerges from this preliminary analysis is that there is some good evidence to support the idea that an embodied relationship with nature, strengthened through physical practice, particularly ritual, is important for the majority of Pagans who responded to the survey. This is very similar to the findings for the Landmatters community, albeit generally to a different degree, caused by the fundamental difference between the immersive experience at Landmatters, and the less immersive experience of the (mainly urban) respondents. There is also some strong evidence to suggest that there is a big difference between the two in terms of the engagement with ethical issues, particularly those to do with the environment, while respondents' attitudes are pro-green, there is a weaker level of 'follow-through' in translating this into action: there is little action, and even less activism in all categories. This is a notable difference from the Landmatters interviewees, who were all dedicated activists and whose lives centred round these kinds of actions, but it is similar to the general pattern identified by Macnaghten and Urry who assert that:

people recognised the effects of environmental damage in their daily lives, were worried about the unknown and future and shared a sense of disgust and loss. However, people in the focus groups had not significantly restructured their lifestyles, nor were they engaged in collective forms of protest or lobbying (Macnaghten and Urry 1998, 237).

Now the reasons behind the difference here may be more complex: it would be easy to say that the Landmatters group have that immersive experience, and indeed equally easy to argue the contrary, namely that they were all committed

activists before arriving there, so that other factors are at work. While it is true that the Landmatters interviewees were people who had prior commitment to activism, it is worth remembering that the primary motivations that they identified were relational and embodied, and the fact that a great deal of their prior experience that lead them to Landmatters was of a similar nature. Experiences such as Rooh's description of travelling with a handcart and Emma's life at the Nine Ladies protest camp — these are experiences catalysed by their embodied responses to nature.

9. Survey Analysis — Comparison of Attitudes

Having done an outline analysis of survey responses, I then attempted to map these responses onto the scale of environmental points of view posited earlier. My thesis is that there are two discourses of nature informing contemporary Paganisms: the animist discourse which privileges a somatic and literal understanding of nature, and the esoteric, privileging a symbolic understanding. I argue that most forms of Paganism are informed by both of these, and that there is likely to be a ‘sliding scale’ between the two discourses (Figure 9.1). As I suggested earlier, particular points of view may be indicated by drawing lines vertically across the diagram. I theorise that the further to the left on the diagram one is, then the more likely one is to engage with the embodied ethic in one’s approach to the environment.

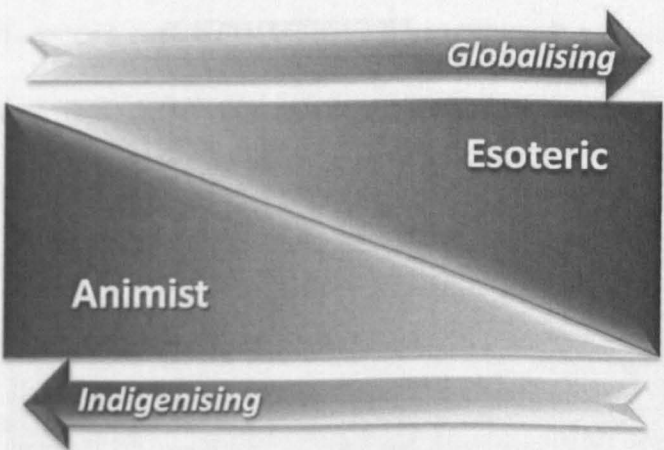


Figure 9-1. The Animist / Esoteric Spectrum

In my second level of analysis, I have tried to establish a correlation between this diagram and the survey responses. I have done this by selecting three groups of respondents. This was done using the responses to the question ‘Which traditions

have most influenced your practice?’ Here I selected individuals who identified as ‘initiate/active member’ of one particular group. (I also included individuals who identified in this way with two groups within the same category, but excluded those who identified membership across categories). Using this approach I was able to identify a group of 306 respondents (out of an original group of 545), who I divided into three groups based upon their affiliation. The groups were composed thus:

- Group **A** — Gardnerian and Alexandrian Wicca.
- Group **B** — Druids, Eco-Pagans, Shamans, Reclaiming Wicca.
- Group **C** — Thelema, Ceremonial Magick, Chaos Magick.

In terms of the diagram, and based upon the discourses, publications and expressions by those groups (discussed in more detail above, Figure 6.2), it would be reasonable to expect that group B should be at the left of the diagram, group C at the right, and group A about halfway (Figure 9.2). I then used these groups to

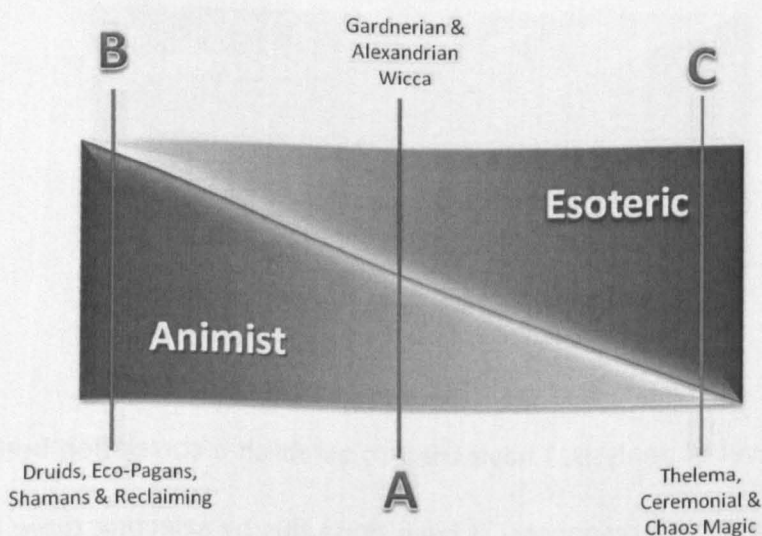


Figure 9-2. groups A, B, and C plotted on the Animist/Esoteric Spectrum

extract data for comparison, to see if the survey responses reflect a similar positioning on this scale.

While groups A and B were of a sufficient size to allow for reasonable interpretation (111 and 167 respectively), group C was much smaller (28). This means that when comparing data, one individual within group C can substantially distort the overall figures, so I will generally not be referring to group C, concentrating instead upon the differences between groups A and B, with a few exceptions where group C are particularly interesting, and, if they represented a more general trend, might support my thesis. It is worth emphasising though, by reference to the diagram at Figure 9.2, that groups A and B are not diametrically opposed, but in fact quite close (and at points may overlap one another), thus any differences between them should not be expected to be dramatic.

A demographic analysis points out that, generally speaking, groups A and B are very similar. The differences that exist tend to be very small — usually one or two percent, suggesting that there is a considerable degree of consistency between these two groups. In terms of the most basic demographic comparison between groups A and B, group B has slightly more men than group A, although both groups are predominantly female. The age profile of the two groups was very similar, with the average for each group being within one year of each other (group A 35, group B 36). Group B respondents were slightly more highly educated (with 61% having an undergraduate or postgraduate qualification, as opposed to 50% of group A). Although nearly a quarter of each group declined to give information about their income, based upon the remaining information, group A were marginally higher

earners. The employment statistics have one interesting factor, which is that the highest for every group was the category 'education, teaching and lecturing' (though this may reflect upon the publicity that this survey received through the Natrel e-list). Interestingly, the numbers reporting that they 'lived an alternative lifestyle' were very low (4% of group A, less than 1% of group B) and there were no members of group A who worked in the area of 'Natural resources and the environment'. Geographically speaking, group B had the widest spread, with members from fourteen countries (including the Falklands, UAE and Thailand), although the highest percentage (49%) were from the UK. Group A had members from ten countries, with the largest number being from the USA. The same is true of group C (although only five countries were included here). In terms of place of residence, members of group B were marginally more likely to live either in the countryside or in a city, whereas group A were more likely to live in suburbs.

When looking at the figures to do very specifically with 'Paganism', group A were more likely to work regularly with 'a close knit group of initiates', and group B were more likely to be 'Solitary', although the biggest difference in practice was to do with working with 'Family or Close Friends', where group B were substantially more likely to do this (14% opposed to 4% in group A). I suspect that this may have something to do with the structural nature of initiatory Wicca, where the emphasis is put upon a formal coven structure, although the actual intensity of relationships in both cases may be very similar. In terms of personal practice, the consistent picture remained essentially the same, with most respondents (A42%, B 50%, 43%) saying that they had a daily spiritual practice. Both groups A and B were also very

similar in terms of the extent to which their friends, colleagues and family knew they were Pagan, although in every case it was noticeable, if not exactly surprising, that the percentage for friends was higher, and that for colleagues was lower.¹⁵ In every case these were very similar figures, the difference being less than half of one percent.

Embodiment

One of the things that I was trying to get from the survey was a sense of the respondents' consciousness of the influence of embodied practice on their spirituality. One of the interesting things to emerge from this was that the usual clear and obvious split between group A and group B was not present, unless the answers are submitted to a second degree of analysis. It was apparent that there were activities listed that might be described (certainly by respondents' attitudes) as *religiously Pagan* (which includes activities usually undertaken in a particularly spiritual or religious mindset, such as meditation, or making ritual); others might be seen as *peripherally Pagan* (which includes activities that could be performed in a spiritual or religious mindset, such as visiting sacred sites); and still others that were, by the same token *un-Pagan* (in the sense that they are not necessarily, or exclusively Pagan: such as gardening, yoga, surfing or sex). I think that it is worth teasing these strands apart before looking at the differences.

In terms of the *religiously Pagan*, there was often very strong agreement from both groups with the idea that these practices had enabled them to develop spiritually.

¹⁵ Though group C had the highest percentages in all these categories — they were the most obviously public about their Spirituality.

Thus for meditation, both groups had percentage aggregate agreement scores in the 90s (A 92.7%, B 94%), though, once again, group B had a slight lead. In terms of ritual practice, the usual pattern was reversed (Figure 9.3), with group A being more likely to have benefited from individual ritual and also substantially benefited from group ritual.

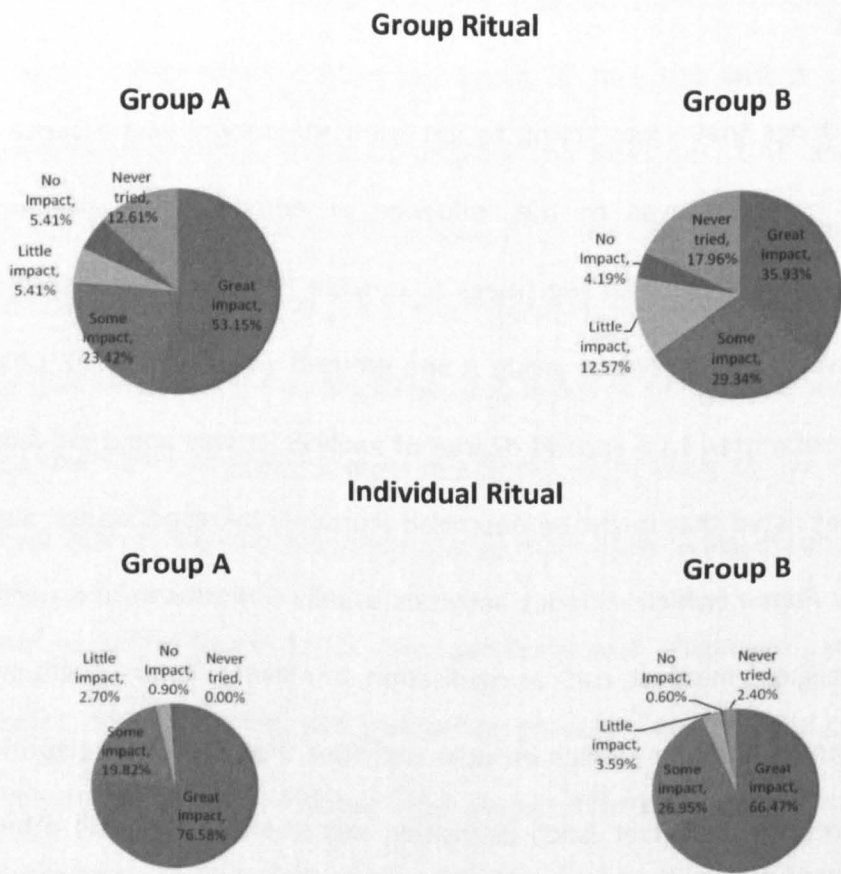


Figure 9-3. Comparative benefit of individual and group ritual.

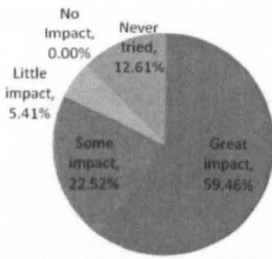
This emphasis upon the importance of individual rather than group ritual is not particularly surprising when one considers that the vast majority of both groups had indicated that they were solitary practitioners, although the high figures for ‘never tried’ are actually notable (particularly when one considers the almost universal assumption that making ritual is a hallmark of Pagan practice).

There are two categories which I would quantify as *peripherally Pagan* (Figure 9.4), which are 'visiting sacred sites' (in this case, the use of the descriptor 'sacred' rather than another term denotes that there is a particular spiritual value attached), and 'drumming', although I think that the significance of this may be more of a hallmark of American Pagan festivals. Pike notes that "Longtime festival goer Peh told me that... for many NeoPagans [drumming] has come to symbolize festival experience, and, if they are drummers, to locate their place in and importance to the festival community. Drumming has become one of the most important activities at festivals" (Pike 2001, 192).

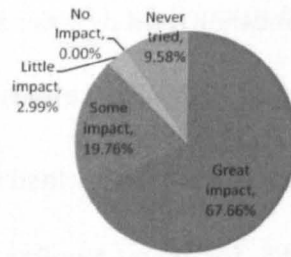
The difference between the two groups in terms of 'visiting sacred sites' is notable, particularly in the 'strongly agree' category (a difference of 8%), which would seem to support group B's position on the continuum; if the world is understood as a layer of symbols overlaying a spiritual reality, as in the esoteric discourse which I would expect to have greater influence upon group A, then there is no need to actively work at developing relationships with particular places.

Visiting Sacred Sites

Group A

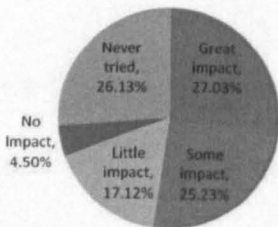


Group B



Drumming

Group A



Group B

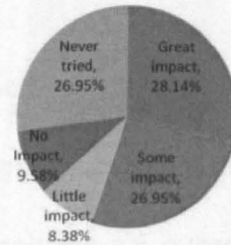


Figure 9-4. Comparative benefits of visiting sacred sites and drumming.

The final category of activities is perhaps the most interesting. These are those which are the *un-Pagan* category, activities that are neither necessarily Pagan, nor even necessarily obviously spiritual (indeed some respondents commented negatively about some of these — suggesting that the inclusion of ‘surfing’ as a category was a joke).¹⁶ Of course, the fact that some individuals identified that each of these things was a strong influence on their spiritual development suggests that they all should have been included (and in fact the high scores for ‘never tried’ for both surfing and martial arts, suggests that while these are not popular

¹⁶ Not one that would be recognised by Bron Taylor, who dedicates a whole chapter of his *Dark Green Religion* to “Surfing Spirituality” (Taylor 2009, 103).

manifestations of Pagan embodied spirituality, as both did get some responses rating them a 'great influence', they were worth including, although the differences between group A and B were the lowest (both below 1% aggregate of 'strong' and 'some' influence).

Amongst the other *un-Pagan* activities, the usual differences between groups A and B remained clear. Group B generally had higher scores for 'strong influence', the differences being: walking in the countryside 9.68%, experience of natural beauty 10.85%, gardening 5.28%, sex 5.03% and camping 0.21 % (although a much greater 12.4% when considering the aggregate of the top two scores). Group A scored higher on yoga by 3.34%, playing sport by 1.12%, and dancing by 0.99%. The very large differences between the groups for walking in the countryside and experience of natural beauty go a long way to justifying the positioning of group B on the continuum (Figure 9.2). I think that it is certainly true to argue that these figures suggest that I have correctly identified group B as situated at the base of the continuum, and that there is a stronger link for these Pagans between everyday somatic experience and their spirituality.

Attitudes and Self-perception

In order to move into a deeper analysis of the extent to which there may be differences between the groups, I am going to start by concentrating upon their attitudes and self-perception. I think that it is significant to point out that belief and practice are not always clearly linked together in a predictable way. I would like to consider the data in the last chapter, when 231 respondents stated that they

‘strongly agree’ that inter-faith dialogue is important. I concluded that one might legitimately expect to find a great many involved with it, but, in fact, only 18 strongly agreed that this was something that they did regularly. There may be many reasons to explain this striking contrast. It may be that while Pagans consider inter-faith dialogue important, they may have other priorities that they consider to be more important. They may find it difficult to get involved (some Pagans have reported being rebuffed by inter-faith groups in the UK), or feel that they lack what they might perceive as specialised language or knowledge that would enable them to do this effectively.

Attitudes to the Environment

Based upon one of the original utterances that inspired the whole project, a primary starting point is the level of agreement with the statement that ‘Pagans have a unique contribution to make to discussions about the environment’ (Figure 9.5). In many respects the responses to this set the tone for much that is to follow in this analysis.

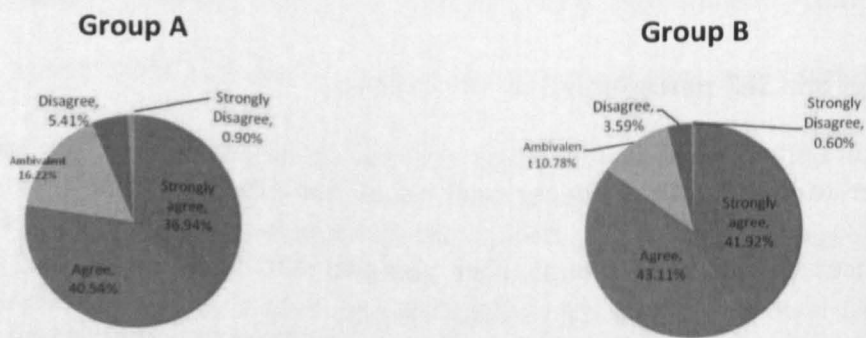


Figure 9-5. ‘Pagans have a unique contribution to make to discussions about the environment’

I think that it is significant that both groups are generally in agreement with the statement, which would certainly underscore the perception of Paganism as being ‘a nature-based or nature-centred religion’. It is, however, notable that there is not universal agreement with this statement, and there is a distinct difference between the two groups. If we aggregate the figures for ‘strongly agree’ and ‘agree’ the difference becomes more apparent. When we do this, we can see that there is, in fact, a difference of 7.5% between the two — with group B being more likely to feel positive about the statement.

This difference is the point that really sets the tone for the rest of this discussion — it is a small, but marked difference between the two groups, and one I would suggest that reflects quite accurately the two different discourses of nature within contemporary Paganism. We need to recall that groups A and B are not at different ends of the scale of possibilities, but almost near neighbours. The consistency of this difference will become apparent throughout the rest of this discussion, and this, I believe, is the important support to my argument. ‘One swallow does not make a summer’, and to attempt to justify this argument based upon one or two points of dissimilarity between two groups would be ludicrous. However, this difference becomes an obvious theme throughout the rest of this analysis. My own experience of analysis brought this home to me — as I was turning the answers for each group into the pie charts that are included here, I would make the pie chart for group A, save it, and then insert the figures for group B. In nearly every case the colours in the chart jumped clockwise, demonstrating that group B were ‘greener’ than group A. This experience of seeing the charts change over and over again in

the same way really underpinned my enthusiasm for the thesis. The average difference between the two groups, in aggregate positive responses to all questions to do with attitudes and beliefs (as opposed to practice and engagement), is 7.28%.

To try and establish the broad attitudes of the respondents, they were asked to express their agreement with a number of broad attitudinal statements about the environment. A good starting point here is the attitudes to the statement: 'The environment is important, and its protection should be a major priority' (Figure 9.6). One might legitimately expect, considering the 'unique contribution' that is so often assumed Pagans might make, that this would attract a strong positive response. When one looks at the responses it is clear that this is something with which both groups agree (when the 'strongly agree' and 'agree' responses are added together, the difference is only 2.7%), yet the way in which the strength of that feeling is articulated is very different, with the 'strongly agree' sections differing by 12.7%.

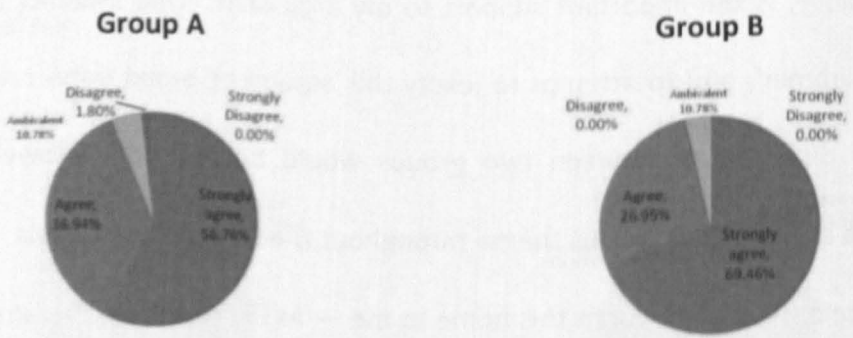


Figure 9-6. 'The environment is important, and its protection should be a major priority'

It would be reasonable to argue from this that, while respondents from both groups feel that green issues are important, it is substantially more likely to be felt more keenly by group B.

Further evidence for this supposition may be found in another broad attitudinal statement: ‘Environmental issues are the most important issues in politics’ (Figure 9.7). Considering the starting point of strong agreement with the idea that Pagans might have a special contribution to make here, I was anticipating much stronger overall agreement — although once again we can see that, when adding together the figures for ‘strongly agree’ and ‘agree’, we have a difference of 7.6% in favour of group B.

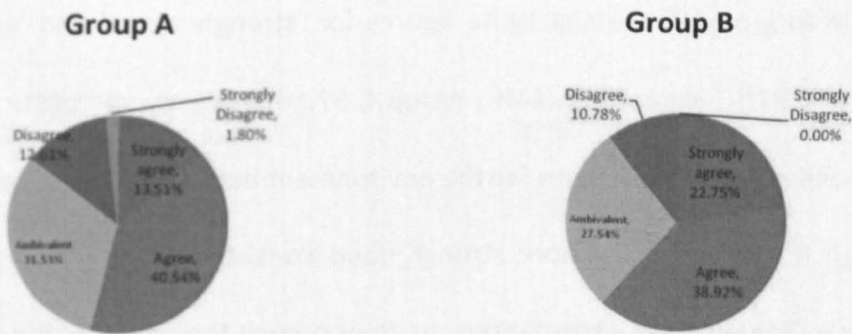


Figure 9-7. ‘Environmental issues are the most important issues in politics’

That both groups are, broadly speaking, concerned with environmental issues, is incontestable — although it is equally clear that there is a difference between the two groups, with B expressing a greater degree of concern. It is also true for both groups that this concern is not merely vaguely felt, but, under the right circumstances, would be a motivator to specific generosity. When asked to identify with the statement ‘I would give part of my income if I were certain that the money

would be used to prevent environmental pollution’ (Figure 9.8), both groups responded positively,

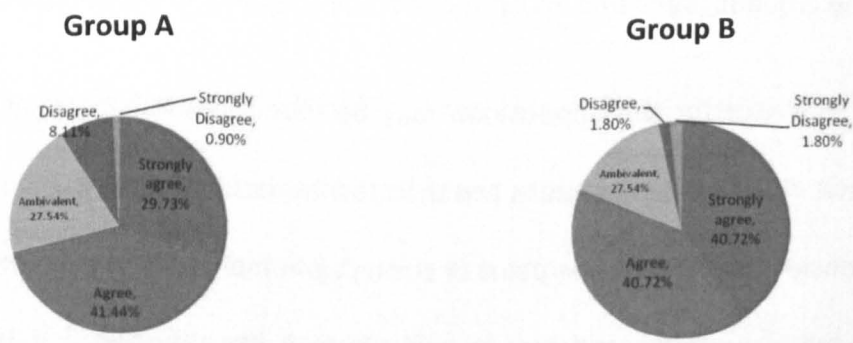


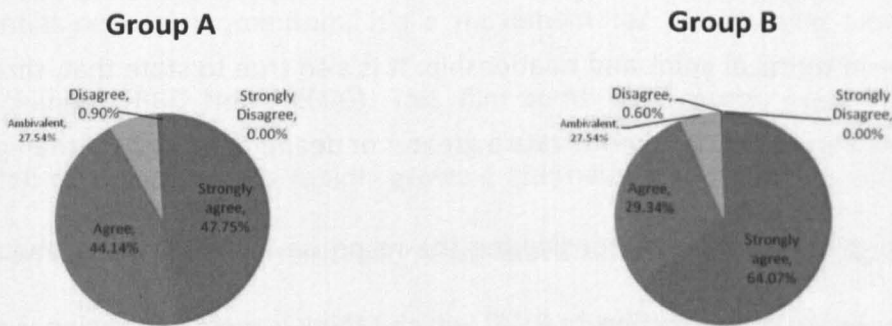
Figure 9-8. ‘I would give part of my income if I were certain that the money would be used to prevent environmental pollution’

although this was one area where group C stands out as being on the other end of the scale to group B: the aggregate figures for ‘strongly agree’ and ‘agree’ being group A 72.97% , group B 81.44% , group C 57.14%. The overall picture emerging here is one of a strong concern for the environment being shared by both groups — although if anything, felt more strongly (and consistently) by group B, which is broadly in line with my expectations, as they occupy the space at the base of the attitudinal diagram, with a view of nature informed almost exclusively by the animist discourse of nature, which valorises an embodied ‘I-Thou’ relationship with nature *qua* nature. By contrast, it is worth noting that group C’s results here do not compare well to the figures put forward by Machnaghten and Urry, who point out that: “Cambridge polls have shown that respondents who chose “we must sacrifice economic growth in order to preserve and conserve the envrionment” rather than the converse grew from 38% to 64% between 1976 and 1990” (Macnaghten and

Urry 1998, 81). This would seem to support the assertion that group C's emphasis upon an esoteric discourse of nature would disincline them to active engagement.

When we move away from these broad statements towards statements reflecting a more personal approach, the connection between the environmental concern and the Pagan identity begins to become more apparent. Nearly all respondents strongly agreed with the statement that: Nature can be profoundly moving' (once again, group B had a slight lead over group A — 89 to 86%), although statements with which one might expect greater Pagan resonance (Figure 9.9) produced a similar level of difference, as found earlier.

'I am often aware of the spirit of place when I am in particular locations'



'I feel a very close sense of connection to the land'

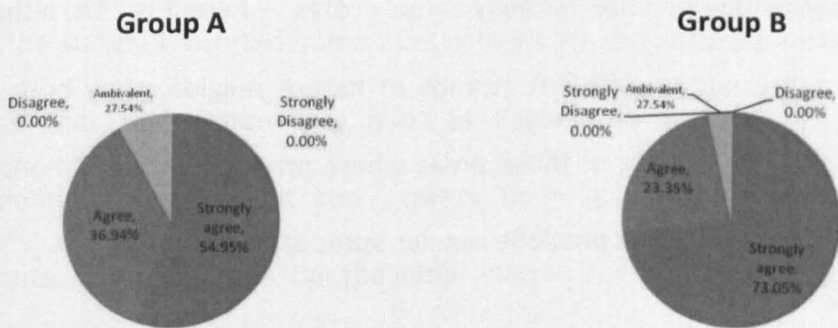


Figure 9-9. Comparative sense of connection to place.

The statement: 'I am often aware of the spirit of place when I am in particular locations' drew strong agreement from both groups (when the agreement scores were aggregated — that is 91% and 93%), although group B still express a strong lead in the 'strongly agree' area of 16.3%. The other statement was 'I feel a very close sense of connection to the land', where once again both groups were enthusiastic, but once again group B lead group A by 18% (interestingly group C's 'strongly agree' percentage here was only 39%).

Throughout this first section of attitudinal statements it has been quite obvious that the responses demonstrate that, in broad terms, these Pagans are interested in environmental issues, and prepared to engage with some degree of personal sacrifice in order to make things better. They are happy to articulate this in Pagan terms — in terms of spirit and relationship. It is also true to state that, throughout these answers, group B demonstrate a greater or deeper level of care than group A.

I will finish this section by considering the response to a statement about Pagan activities in the outdoors (Figure 9.10), which I think is most interesting in terms of the difference between groups A and B. We can clearly see that, once again, there is a big difference between the 'strongly agree' scores — here it is 23%, although as percentages representing different strands of nature religion, they both appear quite low. This may be one of those areas where practical considerations — like unfavourable weather, might preclude regular outdoor ritual work.

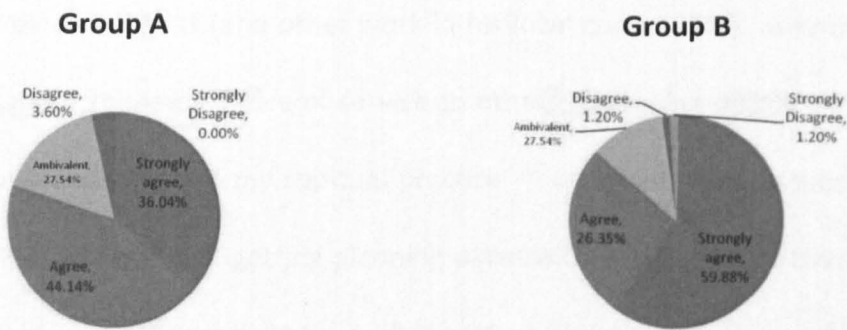


Figure 9-10. 'I prefer to celebrate festivals, perform rituals, in the outdoors'

Attitudes to Politics

On the very day that I am writing this (Winter Solstice, 2009), the *BBC 10 O'clock News* has an article on the number of Pagans celebrating the solstice, where Linda Woodhead states: "It's a serious competitor for traditional religion, and it's got a lot of potential political momentum. It's a movement for people who want quite radical change" (BBC News 2009). This film sums up a pretty typical modern perception of Paganism — a rapidly growing alternative to conventional forms of religion, an engaged form of spirituality, and, above all, environmentally aware. The reporter stated that: "For Pagans, our relationship with the earth defines who we are, and they will act to protect it with increasing determination" (BBC News 2009).

Within the survey I inserted some questions to try and attempt to tease out the attitudes that my respondents had, as Pagans, to political issues. I asked respondents to think about and express their agreement with a number of statements. It was obvious from the initial analysis that most respondents believed that there was a strong link between their own spiritual path and their political position (Figure 9.11), and that this was a legitimate position for them to take.

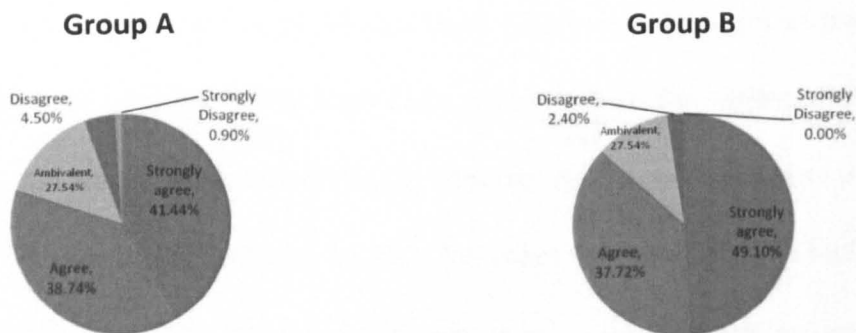


Figure 9-11. *My spiritual path and my beliefs have a big impact upon the way that I think about politics.*

The difference between groups A and B in this respect was particularly marked, which was unsurprising given the focus of their spirituality in the tangible world. The difference between the two groups was also to be found in their attitudes to the statements that: ‘Pagans have a unique contribution to make to politics’, and: ‘It is important for Pagans to be involved in local politics’. In both cases the differences were marked, and, using aggregates of agreements, the difference in the former was 9.6%, and in the latter 12.9%, which is particularly significant.¹⁷ There was also general disagreement in both groups with the statement that: ‘Paganism has nothing to do with political issues - it is a spirituality, rather than a political stance’, although once again, the difference between the groups was notable. There is a difference in aggregate agreement scores of 12.9%, suggesting that group B did not agree with this as easily as group A.

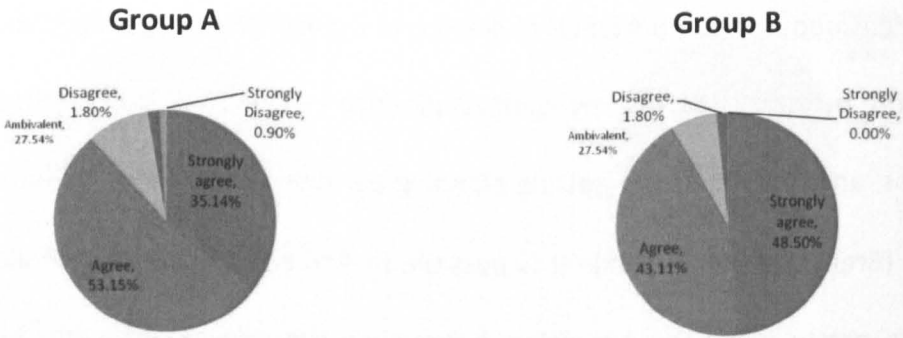
It is not impossible to find individuals who are engaged in this way. One of the respondents who gave a follow-up interview talked about his engagement as a

¹⁷ The difference between groups B and C was even larger in both of these questions — 19.93% in the first, and 16.55% in the 2nd.

Green Party election agent (and other work in his local community), as embodying Druid ideas about the importance of service to others: “Working on my allotment, and in the orchard is part of my spiritual practice — even tedious meetings about elections, and the process of getting planning permission for a wind turbine on my house” (Brennand 2007). While it is possible to find such individuals, in all groups they are pretty much the exception rather than the rule — although there was more enthusiasm for spiritually-inspired political action amongst group B than group A (an aggregate difference of 13%).

A more striking difference between the two groups arises from a more fundamental position — about the individual’s duty to ‘make society fairer and to look after others’ (Figure 9.12).

I believe that we all have a responsibility to make society fairer¹⁸



Every individual has a responsibility to look after others¹⁹

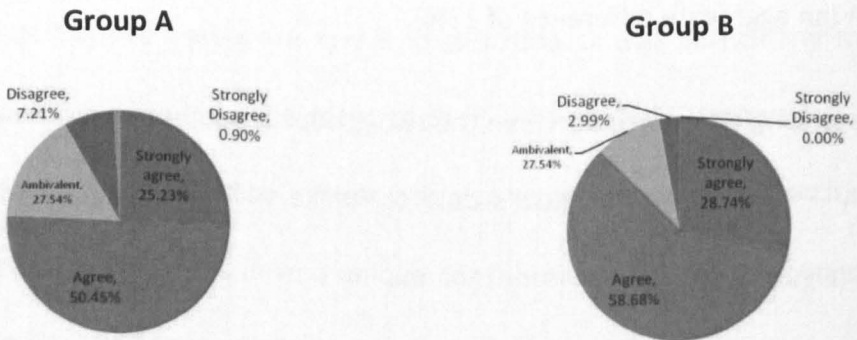


Figure 9-12. Comparisons of perspectives about social fairness.

While I did ask questions that asked groups to identify whether or not they prioritised individual freedom or social equality there was little to choose between them (although group C did stand out as being remarkably libertarian — emphasising individual freedom as a maximum priority). There was a notable difference between groups A and B, which again seems to emphasise the idea that group B are more likely to be engaged. This lack of enthusiasm for political engagement is related to the response to the statement: ‘The Political

¹⁸ When comparing the aggregate scores for this question; group C’s were 71.43%, suggesting that they are indeed situated at the opposite end of the Spectrum to group B.

¹⁹ Here, once again, group C’s answers put them at the far end of the spectrum — 16% aggregate below group B.

Establishment does not take Paganism seriously’ (Figure 9.13) where agreement was pretty strong across the board. This may be one of those chicken or egg issues: is this situation the case because Pagans are not inspired to engage with politics, or are Pagans not inspired to engage with politics because of this perception?

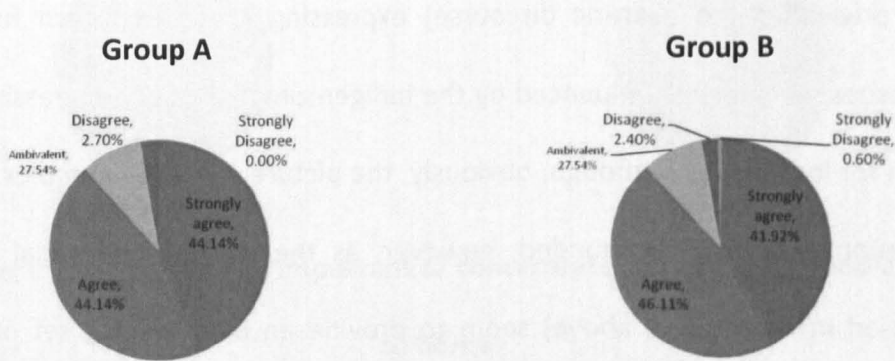


Figure 9-13. The political establishment does not take Paganism seriously.

I suspect that it is not a straightforward choice. Faith positions in politics in Western Europe (and non-Christian faith positions in the US) have not played a large part for many years, and so there may well be a more over-arching issue here that may affect other groups. What I think is interesting is what is implied by the tiny difference between Group A and B; this may be a reflection of the ways in which Group members have had different experiences. Perhaps Group A’s experience of engagement, and of being taken seriously, suggests that the onus lies upon Pagans to earn the respect of the establishment through wider engagement.

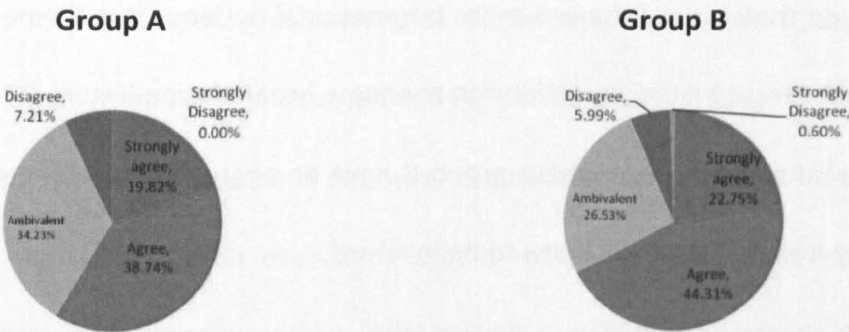
Attitudes to Issues of Globalisation

Although I have mentioned globalisation before, in the context of the two pressures (globalising and indigenising) acting upon Paganism, it is worth considering the unique tension here as the issues of globalisation impact upon our two groups. On a

very superficial level what I suppose one might expect to find would be some kind of correlation between the influencing social trajectories, and the attitudes to global issues. Thus, one might expect Pagans who are more heavily influenced by the globalising trajectory (and are thus more likely to subscribe to a definition of nature privileging the esoteric discourse) expressing greater concern for these wider issues, and Pagans influenced by the indigenizing trajectory expressing more concern for local issues (although, obviously, the picture would be complex).²⁰ This expectation would be confounded, however, as the priorities of social concern (expressed in Figure 9.12 above) seem to provide an over-arching set of ethical concerns.

²⁰ This possibility was first suggested to me by the experience of collecting donations for the Joliba Trust at a PF National Conference. This trust works to support sustainable development in indigenous communities in Mali, and had been selected for support by the Devon and Cornwall PF “because they are looking after Pagans”. When collecting at the National Conference, contributions were generally enthusiastic, except for my encounters with some Northern Tradition Pagans, who asked “What has that got to do with us?”

As a Pagan, I believe that issues of international development are particularly important.



As a Pagan, I think that it is important to concentrate upon helping people close to home.

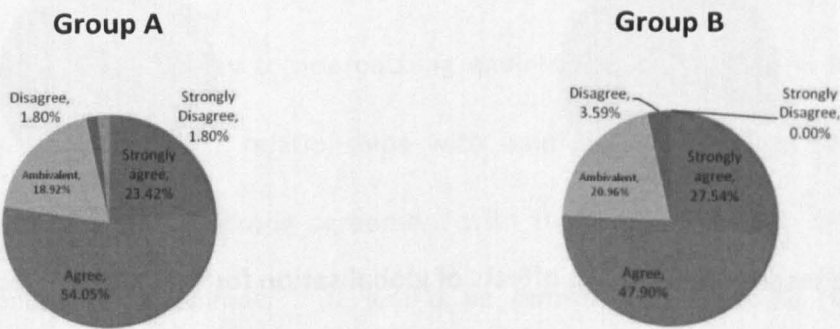
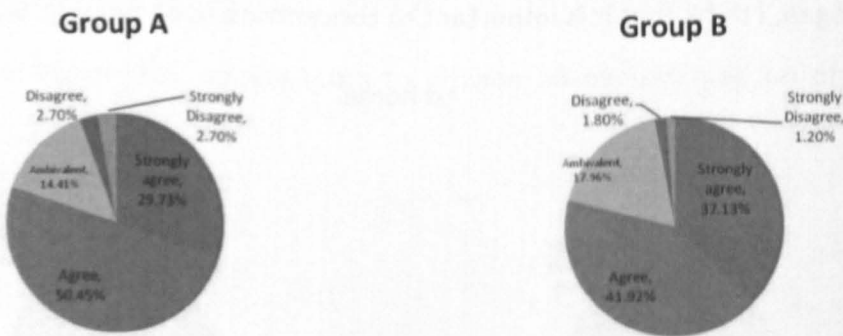


Figure 9-14. Tension between Local and Global concerns.

One might argue that asking both these questions (Figure 9.14) creates an unworkable dilemma for anyone answering who doesn't want to seem inconsistent. Yet, of course, it is perfectly possible to think that international issues are particularly important, and at the same time that it is important to concentrate upon helping people close to home. I think the significance here is in the way that group B maintains that small difference, as I said, more strongly related to an overarching social concern. This broader view also emerges clearly from the responses to: 'International aid is catered for by many charities and NGOs - Pagan activists

should concentrate upon local issues', which both groups generally repudiated, although as usual there was a difference of 5.46 % between the two, once again suggesting that group B have a more international outlook. This theme is one that continues through other questions on the same broad theme (Figure 9.15), and also in terms of direct action, where group B have an aggregate of 10% more likely to consider it important for Pagans to be involved.

I believe that we all have a responsibility to make global society fairer²¹



I am concerned about the effects of globalisation for the poorest people in the world.

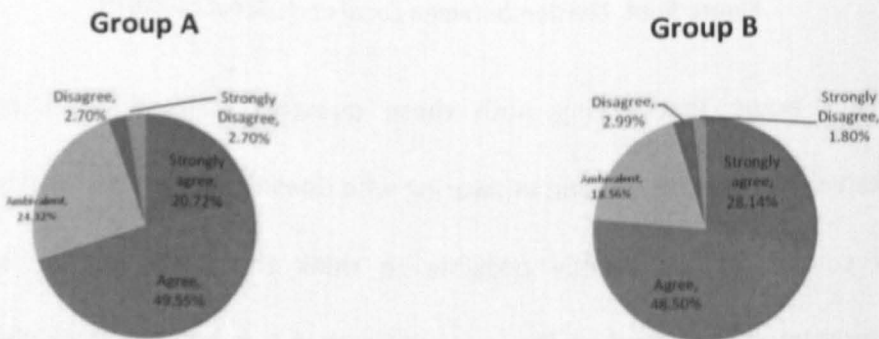


Figure 9-15. Issues of Globalisation

Finally, I return to the two competing discourses of nature with which we began. Our expectations are, if anything, reversed, which raises the question of why this

²¹ Group C respondents produced an aggregate agreement 20.6% below group A.

might be the case. Why are group B more likely to express a consistent level of social concern on a global as well as local level? One possible answer here might well go back to the competing discourses of nature discussed above (Chapter 6). Group B would be more likely to situate the importance of actual persons (whether human or otherwise) firmly within a discourse of environmental ethics — if the real world is all that is real, then everything that is within it is real, conscious and precious. A group A perspective, which is more likely to prioritise intangible spiritual reality, might rate things differently and the evidence would seem to support this.

Attitudes towards Animals and Animal Rights

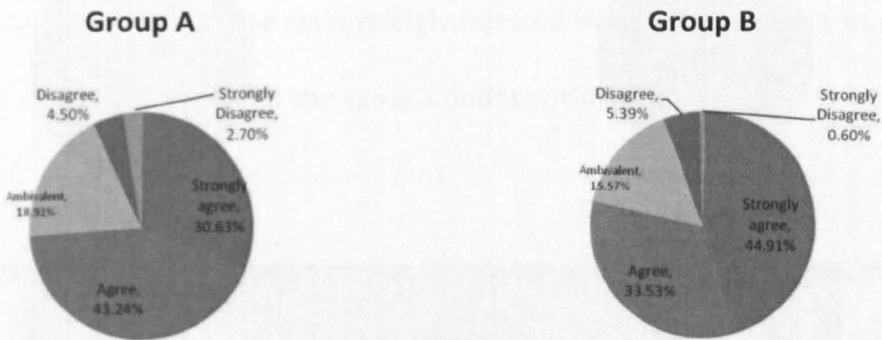
For many individuals, the key to approaching environmental issues is in the way that people approach their relationships with animals. Both groups A and B expressed almost identical strong agreement with the statement that: “I have a close relationship with animals”.²² It would be tempting to theorise that this supports the idea that there would be a sharp distinction between the two groups in their approach to these questions — that the animists would express a stronger relationship than the esotericist (but, of course, with such a small group C, such a conclusion is impossible). The obverse may equally be true, as we saw in considering Strmiska’s work on *blót* (2007): when I attempted to map his division between ethnic and spiritual Pagans onto these trajectories, the spiritual Pagans he writes about are driven by the globalising trajectory (and would therefore be more likely to represent a more esoteric discourse), and the ethnic more driven by the

²² Though interestingly group C did not — “strongly agree” was 14% lower, as was the aggregate of agreement scores.

indigenizing trajectory, which would incline them to a more animist approach to nature. Strmiska's ethnic Pagans are more likely to perform a *blót* than his spiritual Pagans, neatly demonstrating the inherent slipperiness of such academic categorizations.

When we move into the key areas of ethical consideration though the differences between the groups once again appear very evident. In considering two very important questions relevant to the ethical value that people give to animals (Figure 9.16) we can see that the tendency towards a more generous ethical recognition, which we noted above in regards to human beings from group B, continues here towards animals too. Interestingly, when reversing the ethical position, we actually get a larger aggregate difference (14% disagreeing with the second question as opposed to 5% agreeing with the first):

I believe that animals have an equal moral importance to humans - they are conscious, living beings²³



I believe that these things should be kept in perspective - people are more important than animals.

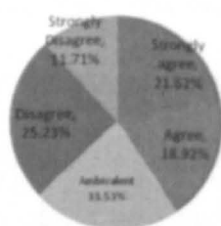


Figure 9-16. Ethical considerability of humans and animals.

Similar levels of disagreement are also to be found in relation to one of the most common situations in terms of animal rights, that of animals as the subject of experimentation. Respondents were asked to express their level of agreement to the statement: 'There is never any excuse for using animals for medical experimentation' (Figure 9.17), and there was, as anticipated, a considerable range of opinion within each group. Group B, however, once again expressed the usual ethical difference from group A,

²³ Group C's aggregate of 'strongly agree' and 'agree' was 14.16% lower than that of group B.

Group A



Group B

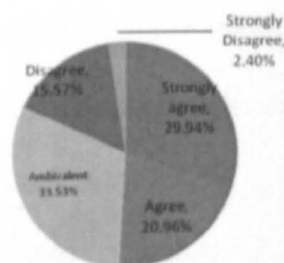
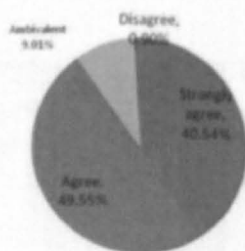


Figure 9-17. *There is never any excuse for using animals for medical experimentation.*

although, overall, there was little difference in the aggregate scores of agreement with the statement: 'Animals have a spiritual component' (Figure 9.18)

Group A



Group B

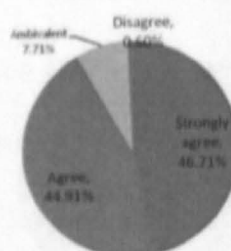


Figure 9-18. *Animals have a spiritual component.*

One of the most significant indicators for attitudes to animals in cultures is the extent to which they are eaten, and both groups within this survey had a majority of meat eaters, although group B had a higher proportion of vegetarians (Figure 9.19). Most respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: "I do not eat meat, as I feel a close, spiritual, link to animals," (aggregate agreement — A 60%, B 67%). The usual difference between group A and B was also present. Interestingly, the response to the question that was most specifically aimed at establishing a uniquely 'Pagan' approach to vegetarianism — 'As a Pagan, I have

special, spiritual reasons for being vegetarian, which a non-Pagan would not share’ — brought the highest response from the vegetarians in group A (27%, with no strong disagreement), and was resoundingly rejected by the vegetarians from group B (only 6% strongly agreed, and the same amount strongly disagreed!).

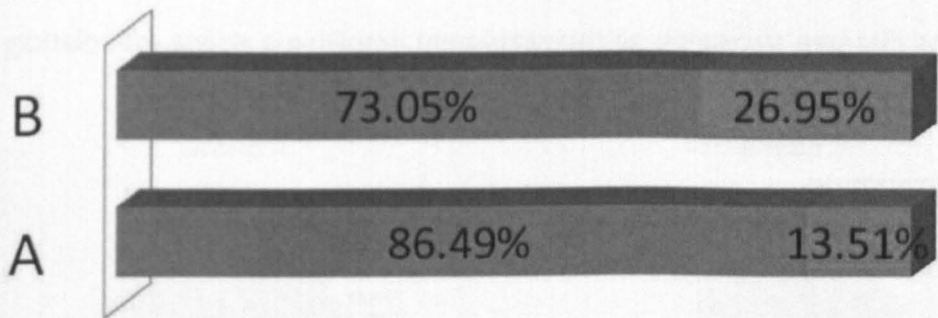


Figure 9-19. Meat eaters / non-meat eaters.

In responses to all the other questions about the links between spirituality and eating meat, however, group B vegetarians maintained the usual difference, with stronger aggregate agreement that ‘Vegetarianism is a more spiritually beneficial way of life’, and that: ‘All Pagans should be vegetarian’, although in both cases the ‘strong agreement’ category was larger for group A. This suggests that the picture is more complicated than one might initially suppose — or that the group A vegetarians, while smaller in number, interpreted their decision to be vegetarian much more strongly in terms of their spirituality than group B. I think that the key difference, though, is obvious in the final statement to which vegetarians were asked to respond (Figure 9.20). Here it is clear that there is a difference between the two groups. It is not between those who strongly agree that their vegetarianism is an expression of their Paganism, but it is between the ‘next layer

down’ — those who see their life choices as expressed in animistic or relational terms, and those who do not.²⁴ When looking at Figure 9.20, there are two differences that are relevant to this — obviously the existence of the ‘20% agree’ for group B, a category that does not exist at all in group A, and also the 9% difference in the ‘strongly disagree’ category — where 13.3% of group A vegetarians disagree strongly with this statement, implying a strong repudiation of the idea.

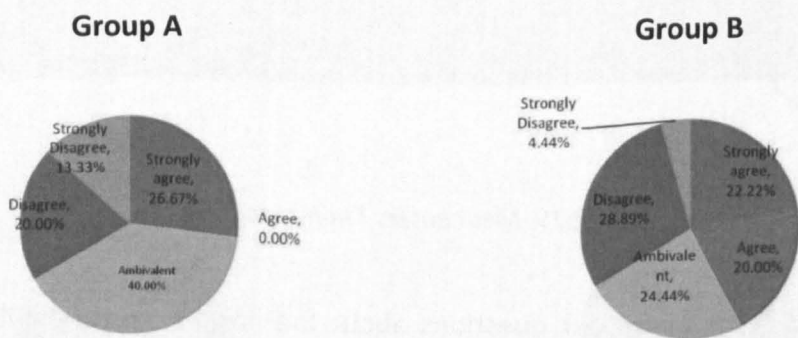


Figure 9-20. Not eating meat is important in order to maintain close relationships with animal persons / spirits

Amongst the much larger percentages of respondents who were meat-eaters a similar pattern of different levels of concern emerged. While the majority of both groups A and B agreed with the statement: ‘I always buy meat that has been raised with high standards of animal welfare’ (aggregate agreement — A 57%, B 60%) this was the only statement where the usual small difference applied.

²⁴ It is, I think, worth pointing out the caveat that this kind of “relational language” is more commonly used in the literature and discourse of group B than group A, although I think that the inclusion of the term ‘spirits’ in addition to ‘persons’ means that I am justified in drawing these conclusions.

A much more representative difference is found in the response to the idea that: ‘I am happy to spend more money on meat from animals that have been well cared for’ (Figure 9.21), where the difference is strongly marked — with group B exhibiting a generally higher level of agreement (aggregate difference 5.46%), although, of course, it is also true that the ‘strongly disagree’ section for group B is larger too — indicating that some repudiate this concept.

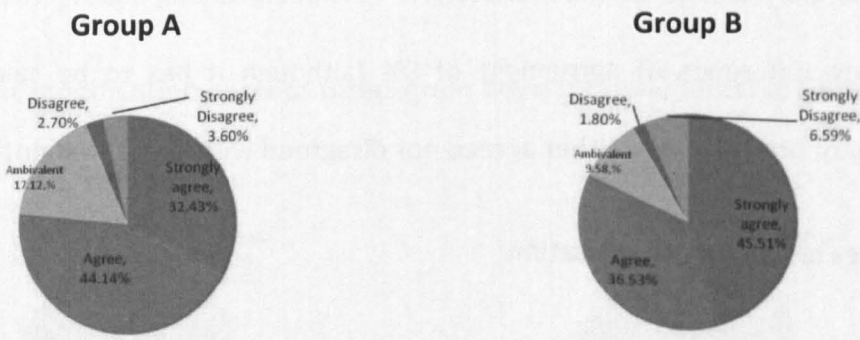


Figure 9-21. ‘I am happy to spend more money on meat from animals that have been well cared for’.

The final question in this section is one that returns us to the starting point for this section — considering Pagan reconstructionism. It is often suggested here (as it would be by Strmiska’s ethnic Pagans), that an attempt to reconstruct ancient Pagan lifeways and practices should include those practices which were typical of the original practitioners. Rabinovitch & MacDonald’s assertion that [for some Pagans] “eating animal meat is fine, but... ethically, they must hunt and kill it themselves in order to truly honor the spirit of the animal that feeds them” (Rabinovitch and Macdonald 2004, 67) reflects an argument that I have frequently encountered in on-line discussion with American Pagans, who have strongly articulated this point of view. [“I grew up eating meat!! Big surprise, some of us are

NOT vegetarians, like eating meat is a crime!! My ancestors were hunters!! ('Celticclass' 2008)]. Whilst such a view-point is part of the discourse of many contemporary indigenous practitioners, I suspect that carrying the argument that: 'It is alright to do things just because my [Celtic] Pagan ancestors did them' would break down long before the re-introduction of other cultural practices like head hunting or human sacrifice. In response to the statement: 'Pagans should attempt to follow the lifestyle of their ancestors - including eating meat', there was an aggregate difference of agreement of 8% (although it has to be said that the majority of both groups neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement).

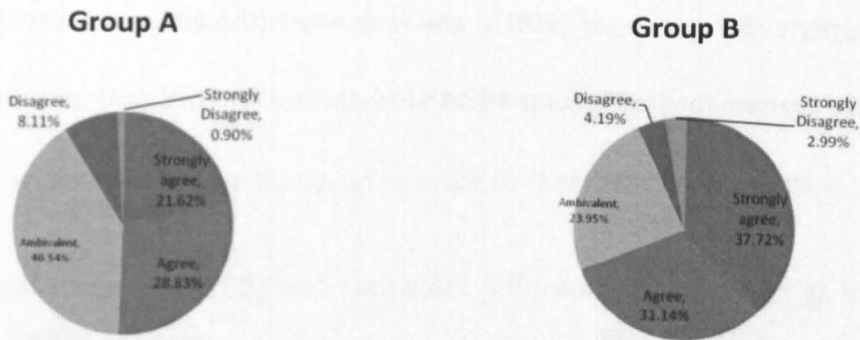
Attitudes to Genetic Modification

The issues surrounding genetic modification of plants have been at the forefront of much environmental activism in the West for some years — and indeed, this is something with which Pagan activists have been involved. As Harris says in response to a published critique of lack of Pagan engagement with the issue:

Nor have we been idle over GM crops. Pagan activist Martin Porter reported a successful protest against a GM crop in Imbolc 2001 (Pagan Dawn 138) and other Pagans have been weaving effective magic against this aberration for years (Harris 2004).

Due to the subject's high profile nature, I was expecting to encounter less disagreement between the groups here, but, in fact, the usual trend of group B having slightly higher ethical regard for nature persisted, once again, clearly linked to their Paganism.

Genetic Modification is a dangerous technology that threatens the balance of nature.



The genetic modification of crops offers great hope for the poorest in the world²⁵

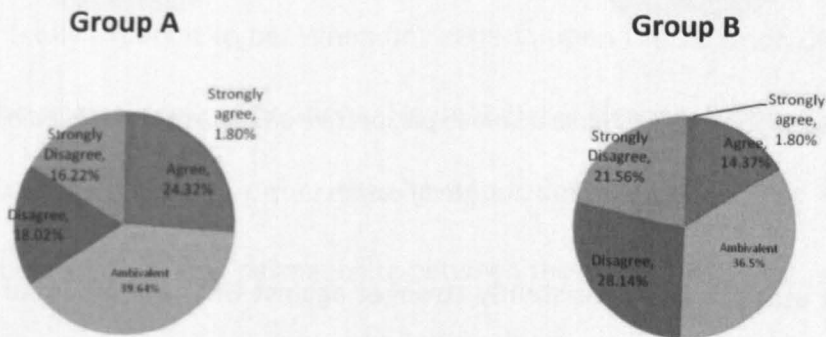


Figure 9-22. Attitudes to genetic modification.

When we look at the responses to two statements that sum up the different ends of the scale of attitudes to GM we can see the difference between the two groups quite clearly (Figure 9.22). In response to the first statement, which describes GM as a dangerous and threatening technology, the difference of aggregate agreements is 19.4 %, which is a considerable gulf — although most of the difference is absorbed by the ‘ambivalent’ response, rather than large scale disagreement. When we look at the opposite end of the scale — where GM is

²⁵ The strongest agreement here came from group C, where an aggregate of 39.29% agreed and strongly agreed.

described as of positive benefit to the poor, a similar, if not quite so strong, difference emerges — much stronger disagreement from group B (an aggregate disagreement difference of 28%), and stronger (though not ‘strong’ *per se*) aggregate agreement from group A (3.4%).



Figure 9-23. *As a Pagan I have a unique perspective on the issues surrounding Genetic Modification*

Group B’s attitude was consistently stronger against GM, and in favour of organic produce — 11.79% more likely to avoid buying GM, 13.92% more likely to buy organic produce, and 10.88% more likely to be willing to spend more money to buy organic produce. Most interestingly, members of group B were more likely to think about their opposition to GM in relation to their Paganism, (Figure 9. 23) although the large ‘disagree’ categories in both groups suggest that for the majority of respondents this was a larger issue.

Conclusion

I think that the most important starting point for this conclusion is to remember that all the respondents to this questionnaire were a self-selecting group of Pagans who chose to go out of their way to complete a questionnaire that set out to

examine their attitudes to green or environmental issues. It may be true to suggest that their attitudes therefore may be unrepresentative of Pagans as a whole. One thing that does emerge from these answers is that, on the whole, respondents express attitudes that display considerable enthusiasm for both a green point of view, and a willingness to give things up in order to manifest this in practice.

It is clear that there is a strong and consistent difference in the attitudes towards the environment demonstrated by groups A and B. This is not an exceptionally large percentage (an average of 7.28%), but, as I stated at the beginning, one should not really expect it to be. When one reflects upon the situation of groups A and B on the original scale of positions (Figure 9.2) it is clear that these groups are, in fact, relative neighbours, rather than in opposition to one another — indeed there may be a considerable permeability between them. It is, however, significant that the picture which emerges from this attitudinal survey — of much stronger ‘pro-green’ attitudes amongst group B, in many cases explicitly linked to Pagan identity or practices, supports the thesis that there is confusion arising from the use of two separate and distinct discourses of nature within Paganism. As I stated above, while the difference here may not be large, it is consistent. There is a strong argument from this evidence (Figure 9.24) that group B certainly do a better job of meeting Clifton’s Challenge— “Live so that someone ignorant about Paganism would know from watching your life or visiting your home that you followed an ‘earth religion’” (Clifton 1994, 126).²⁶

²⁶ And indeed that group C do the worst job of all three — with only 53.57% agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement

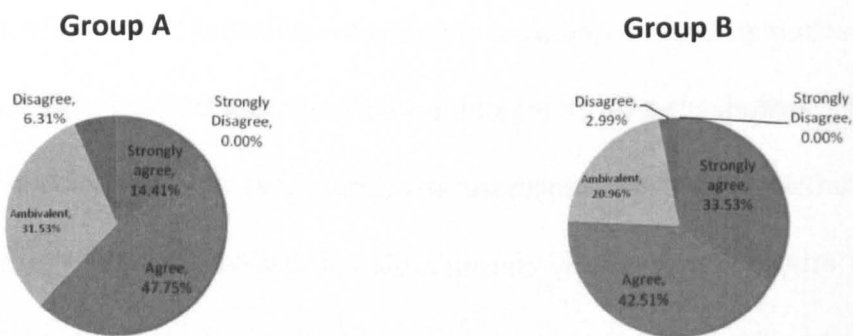


Figure 9-24. 'Most of my friends would describe me as someone committed to environmental issues'

10. Survey Analysis — Comparison of Engagement

Having examined the attitudes expressed by the two groups of respondents expressed in the survey, it is also important to see the extent to which this is lived out in practice — the ways in which they engage their beliefs about the environment in reality. Many of these questions attracted criticism from some respondents, particularly those whose spectrum of possible options included 'getting arrested'. The inclusion of this as an option was simply to allow those whose commitments had led to this outcome to be included — not as an expectation of 'normality'. Once again, my expectation is that group B should demonstrate a higher degree of engagement with environmental issues. This is based upon their position on the animist/esoteric scale — with a greater preponderance of animist discourses of nature informing their understanding. This means that not only will they have very green attitudes, but that those attitudes are more likely to be lived out in their engagement with environmental activities. The average difference between the two groups' attitudinal statements, as we have seen above was 7.2% in favour of group B, and a very similar picture emerges for engagement, where the average difference is 6.31%.²⁷ Once again, the overall picture of group B as more deeply engaged in environmental issues is further underlined. As with the attitudinal answers, this is not a terribly large figure (although there are some strong differences as I drill down into the figures), but it is

²⁷ Measured on the difference between the aggregate of positive responses.

a consistent difference (with one interesting exception — taking part in ritual — which I will examine later).

Respondents were asked to indicate how regularly they participated in different types of activism in relation to various different issues. I take activism in this context to mean ‘intentional activity to support or promote a particular concern’, as opposed to a more conventional image of dreadlocked tree-huggers. There is a wide range of possible activities that might fit into this, but I asked respondents to rate their participation in a ‘spectrum’ of possible forms of activism as below (Figure 10.1)

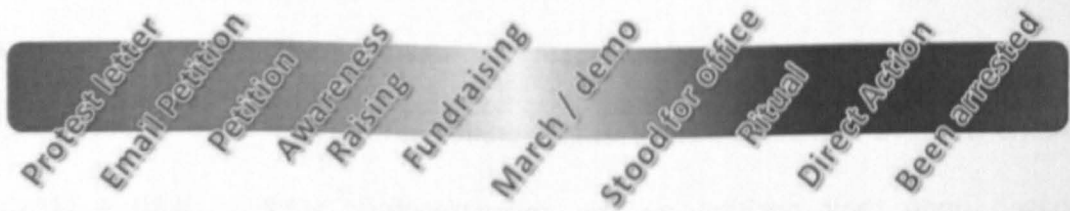
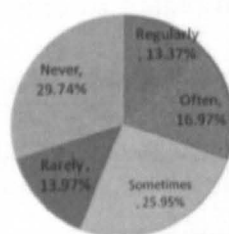
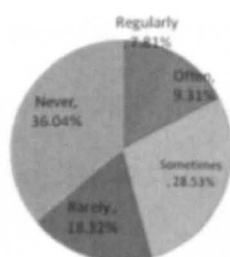


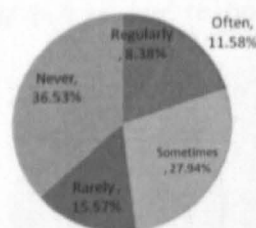
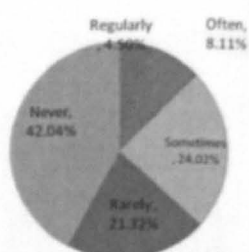
Figure 10-1. The Spectrum of Activism

It is important to note that this spectrum of possible activities, while by no means exclusive, includes a wide range of possibilities that may mesh with the variety of possible engagements from respondents. Thus whilst some of these may be done easily (forwarding an email petition requires very little effort), others are more extreme, and may in fact be socially unacceptable, and should certainly not be thought of as in any way normative. However, I expected that I would have respondents who had engaged in direct action and been arrested, so it was necessary to include those categories.

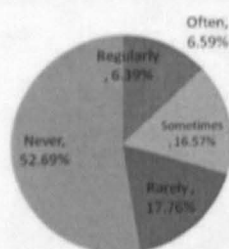
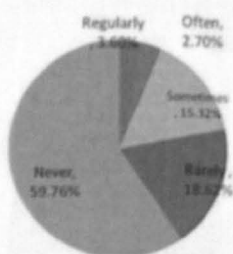
Worked to raise awareness



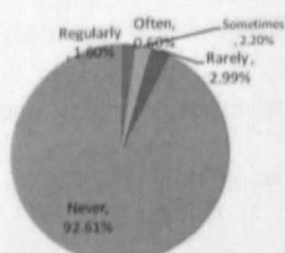
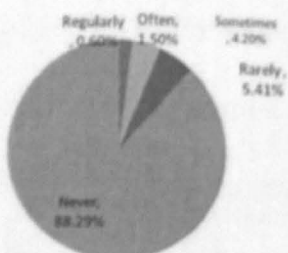
Taken part in Fundraising activities



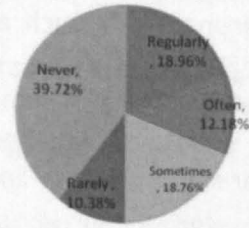
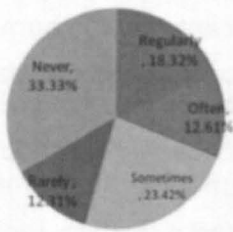
Gone on a March or Demonstration



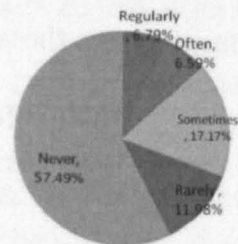
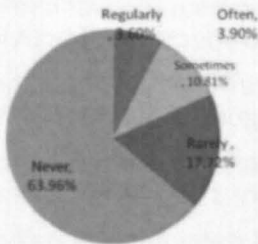
Stood for Office



Taken Part in Ritual



Taken Part in Direct Action



Been Arrested

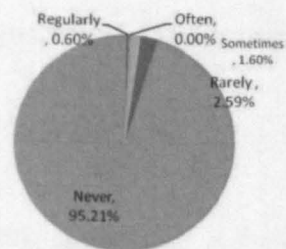
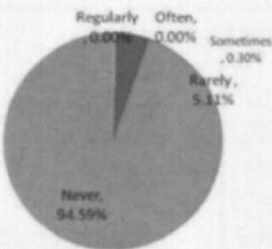


Figure 10-2. Total average responses to Engagement Questions.

I will consider the issues surrounding ritual later, but have to admit to being surprised by the figures for 'stood for office'. This category obviously relates most closely to some of the questions asked in the attitudinal survey to do with feelings about politics, where group B appeared to have stronger feelings, and a more positive experience of political engagement. It must be remembered that these are average figures, and a more focussed picture will emerge when we break them down further.

Engagement and the Environment

As the environment is such an all-encompassing concept, every human being is obviously participating in some form of engagement, but what I am trying to tease out here are the specific forms of positive engagement with (some popularly perceived) environmental issues. This falls into two broad categories: firstly, what might be described as common activities, those that might be done as part of every-day life; secondly, those pertinent to the broad spectrum of activism outlined above (Figure 10.1). With reference to the first category of common environmental activities, when we look at average responses (Figure 10.3) one can see that these follow the usual pattern of group B being more involved than group A (although of course, it is worth noting that, at the same time, group B has a larger percentage who appear never to have engaged with some of these).



Figure 10-3. Participation in Common Environmental Activities²⁹

When we break these down into their separate areas, we find that only in the area of 'cleaning sacred sites' did group A attain a slightly higher aggregate score

²⁹ Recycling, Composting, Car-sharing, Beach/Forest/Site cleaning, Buying Environmentally Friendly Products / Low energy Light bulbs, Using Public transport.

(although neither group had large numbers who did so ‘regularly’).³⁰ However, group B had higher aggregate scores in all other categories, with particularly higher aggregate scores on composting (18.74%), beach/forest cleaning (11.3%), and buying ecologically friendly cleaning products (12.94%). The picture for group B as the champions of ‘environmentally friendly shopping’ is also enhanced by their responses to questions about choosing to use recycled paper (aggregate difference 11.46%), sustainably sourced wood (aggregate difference 20.5%), or small amounts of packaging (aggregate difference 6.9%). Group B also demonstrated much greater enthusiasm for buying ‘fair trade’ products (Table 10.1), where the aggregate difference between the two groups, particularly on the most commonly available fair trade groups is substantially larger in favour of group B.

Coffee	7.94	Sweets	5.05
Chocolate	20.8	Herbs and Spices	10.2
Cotton Products	6.8	Nuts and Snacks	8.01
Silk Products	-4.82	Preserves	-2.76
Fresh Fruit	14.2	Sports Equipment	-0.91
Tea	15.4	Wine	1.15
Sugar	12.2	Aggregate differences between groups — likely or very likely to buy fair trade goods.	

Table 10-1 Aggregate difference between groups on fair trade groups.

³⁰ Difference of 2.7%

When we move onto considering activism in the context of environmental issues, what we are doing is moving away from the kinds of everyday activities that people might take for granted, to those that require some degree of particular intentional effort (see Figure 10.1). The figures that represent the highest overall engagement for both groups were for 'signing a petition'³¹ and for 'doing ritual'³². Most of the other possible forms of activism were under 30% for combined 'regularly' and 'often' scores for both groups. The differences between groups A and B were particularly noticeable in most categories, where the difference in the first five categories was always in excess of 12%.

The other areas of significant difference are not so marked, numerically, but possibly more important, as they are to do with more challenging forms of activism geared towards the right hand side of the spectrum. When one looks at the aggregate of the top three responses (regularly, often and sometimes), group B are 14.28% more likely to have taken part in direct action on environmental issues, and 2.69% more likely to have suffered arrest. It is also interesting to note that 40.12% of group B, and 44.14% of group A have never been involved in direct action (so in both cases we are talking about groups where the majority have, at some stage participated in this way), although it is equally fair to point out that the vast majority of each group (93.69% of group A and 92.81 of group B) has never been arrested.

³¹ Group A 41.55% regularly or often, group B 67.07%

³² Group A 41.55% regularly or often, group B 46.11% (though 16.7% had never done so)

Within these categories of activism there are areas where group A have a lead over group B — ‘standing for office’.³³ If we include the figures for everyone in each group who has ever stood for office, group A are 8.44% more likely to have done this — although in both groups A and B, the majority (A 81.98%, B 88.02%) have never done this. These are actually quite noteworthy figures from each group, and imply a degree of Pagan engagement with some forms of politics (those to do with environmental engagement) that exceeds that of the ‘general population’. The second category where group A enjoy a clear leadership is ‘performing ritual’. If we look at the figures for the top three categories, then group A are 7.12% more likely to have participated in ritual for environmental reasons. There were also many more members of group B (16.77%) who had never done this, in comparison with group A (10.91%). This is particularly interesting, as it would be reasonable to suspect that group B Pagans, those who are more inclined to accept an animist discourse of nature, would be more interested in environmental issues, and therefore more inclined to perform ritual in this context. When we reflect back upon the figures where respondents indicated the influence of (both group and individual) ritual upon their spiritual development, it was the case that group B were much less likely to identify this as a strong influence and were, indeed, more likely never to have tried it. This ties in with the headline figures about performing ritual for particular issues, and will be discussed in more detail below.

³³ It is worth noting that the question sought to establish who had stood for office in specific connection to Environmental issues.

Engagement with Politics

As we have seen, the whole question of Pagan engagement with politics is a tricky one. There are many different view-points in different political systems as to the extent to which it is legitimate to allow religious beliefs or perspectives to influence political decisions, yet there is a logical consistency to the idea that individual voters may be moved either to vote in a particular way, or put themselves forward for office based upon their beliefs. This may be done tacitly (as is more usual in the UK), or very openly (as is more usual in the US). As we saw above (Figure 9.13), there is considerable scepticism amongst Pagans as to whether they are taken seriously by the political establishments, but at the same time, they seem more engaged with politics than the general population.

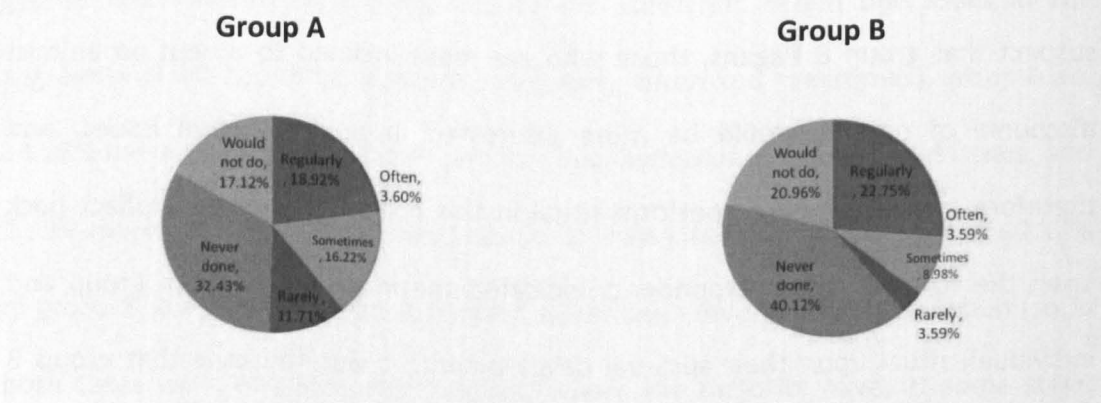


Figure 10-4. *Belong to a Political Party*

When we look at the figures for belonging to a political party (Figure 10.4), probably the most striking ones are those for ‘never done’ or ‘would not do’. We might take from this the idea that these respondents reject membership of political parties. There are, I think, a couple of things that should be remembered in this context. Firstly, that the percentage of people belonging to political parties in western democracies tends to be quite low anyway (Figure 10.5) — an average of 5.3%, by comparison with which these respondents appear to be positively enthusiastic about regular engagement with political parties.³⁴

We also need to remember that the vast majority of respondents are unlikely to be

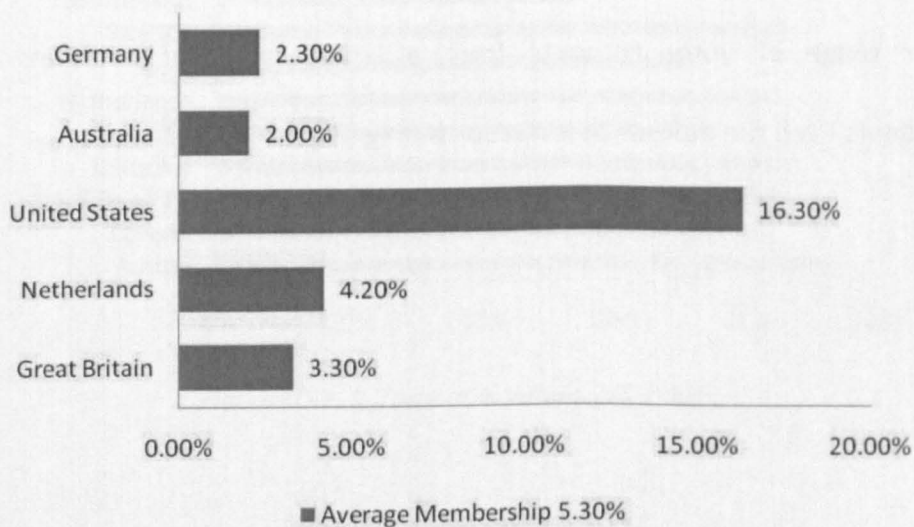


Figure 10-5 Membership of Political Parties

‘natural joiners’ anyway. There is a consistent theme of independent thought running through Paganism, and even within that, most of my respondents were solitary practitioners so are even more likely to be naturally independent. In that context, these figures for membership of political parties suggest considerable

³⁴ With group C being the most enthusiastic of all with 6.05% aggregate difference to group A.

engagement, both positively, in the sense that individuals have belonged, and negatively, in that they have chosen a stance where they 'would not do this', rather than drifting into this position by default. I think it is significant to note that in both these cases group B have larger percentages than group A.

One of the most common markers of political engagement is willingness to vote, and here both groups A and B demonstrated extremely high levels of engagement (Figure 10.6), with group B respondents 10% more likely to have voted regularly.³⁵ While these figures seem very high in comparison to widely reported national voter turnouts — 61.7% in the USA in 2008 Presidential Elections (CNN 2008), or 61.4% in the UK General Election of 2005 (UK Political Info 2008) — when compared to a broader range of voter turnouts from a larger range of countries where respondents lived the difference is not so striking (Figure 10.7).³⁶

³⁵ Although, rather oddly, considering their enthusiasm for belonging to political parties, group C were the least likely to do so; 13% aggregate difference to group B!

³⁶ Calculated by comparison with the average voter turnout in non-compulsory (not Belgium or Australia) national lower house elections 1960-1995 (including only countries where respondents live)

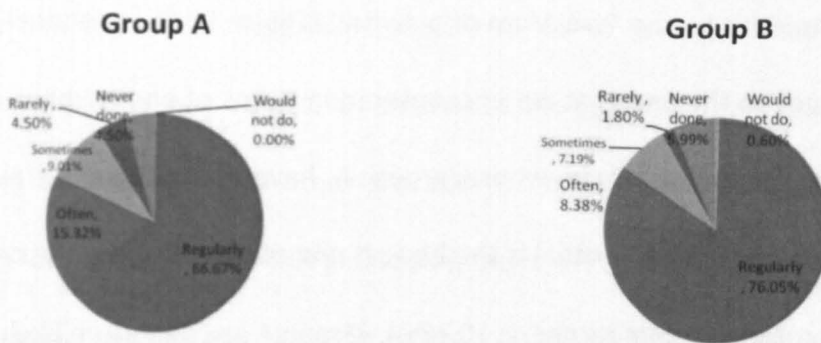


Figure 10-6. Voting in National Elections

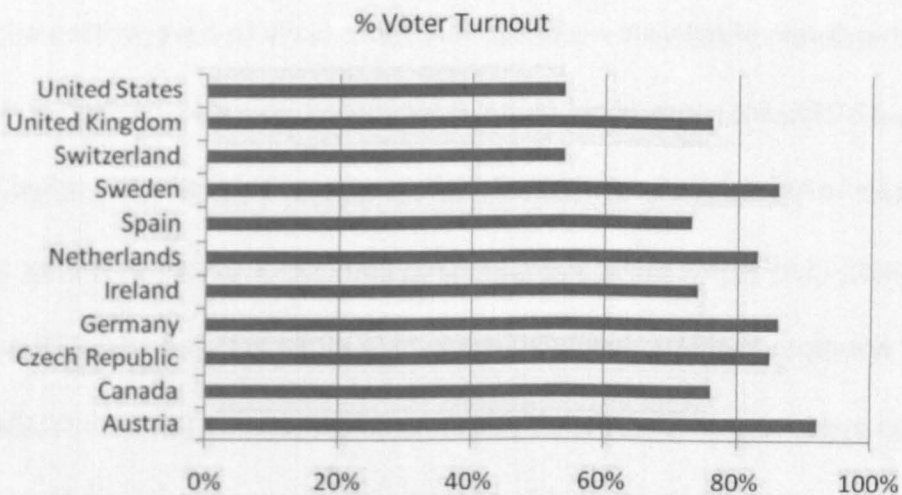


Figure 10-7. % Turnout in national elections.

Having said this, as most of my respondents (81%) do in fact live in the UK and the US, these are the figures that are most suitable for comparison, and thus it is clear that all respondents are considerably more likely than the general public to vote in national elections — with group B respondents much more likely to do so. Group B respondents are also more likely to have worked as an activist for a political party (8.95% aggregate difference — ‘regularly’ and ‘often’), and to have donated money or time to a political party (3.26% aggregate difference).

Looking at the ideas on the 'spectrum of activism' (Figure 10.1), a generally similar picture emerges to the one that we encountered in terms of engagement with the environment. There are areas where group A have a lead over group B — unsurprisingly, taking part in ritual is the biggest one of those (aggregate difference of 'regularly, often and sometimes' is 10.38%). Group A are also more likely to have gone on strike (aggregate difference of 4.84%). There are a couple of categories where group B's lead is slim — they are 0.34% more likely to vote in local elections, 1.18% more likely to have stood for office. Overall group B have a considerable lead in all other forms of activism — 17.52% are more likely to have written a letter of protest, 12.09% are more likely to have forwarded an email petition, 7.84% are more likely to have signed a petition, 8.22 % are more likely to have worked to raise awareness, 13.67% are more likely to have gone on a march or demonstration, 10.21% are more likely to have been involved in direct action, and 3.29% are more likely to have been arrested. Once again it seems reasonable to conclude that those in group B are more likely to want to engage with the world as it is, in the practical, hands-on, and somatic sense typical of the animist discourse of nature.

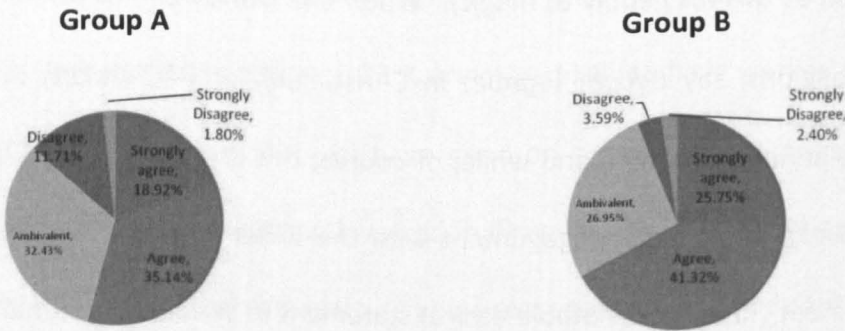
When looking at different engagements with ethics of nature it is easy to tighten the focus so sharply upon the natural world that other people are excluded from the locus of concern. When considering the ways that these groups of Pagans engage with issues of globalisation, I am also trying to see how they express their concern for other groups of people in a rapidly shrinking world, and for their immediate neighbours. In the discussion about attitudes I discussed the way that globalisation may be a driver of the esoteric discourse of nature — inasmuch as

when certain aspects of Paganism (notably forms of Wicca) spread around the world, practitioners may be able to emphasise the symbolic realities expressed in ritual, and thus be closer to other practitioners elsewhere in the world, than to their own local reality. What this globalizing trajectory gives with one hand, it takes with the other, and the nature of the esoteric discourse is to concentrate upon the individual attempting to negotiate their way through the complexities of the spiritual realities to illumination, rather than engaging with the complexities of lived reality around them. It is notable that, in the literature of such forms of Paganism (particularly Wicca) there is very little discussion of ethical behaviour (except inasmuch as this may apply to magic). When one compares this to the teaching of other religions, say *αγάπη* (*agapé*) in Christianity, or *زكاة* (*zakat*) in Islam, this seems a serious omission, and while, of course, this is not to say that Wiccans will not actively seek ethical engagement with the wider world, this is not a 'built-in requirement'. The most notable ethical statement in Wicca — 'an it harm none, do what thou wilt', is predicated upon avoiding harm, rather than increasing happiness. This, of course, may raise difficulties for Pagans who do wish to get involved, particularly when many of the larger or more successful NGOs or charities may seem to have links to particular religions. There is also a broader social expectation that "those actively practising a religion were more likely to have donated [to charity]" (Low, Butt, et al. 2008, 9).

When we examine the figures for our two groups (Figure 10.8), we can see that both groups often make regular donations to charities (although group B are more likely to do so). The figures given here seem quite low by comparison with some

national statistics — as high as 81% in one Cabinet Office report (Low, Butt, et al. 2008, 9). I suspect that these statistics — referring to ‘regular donations’ are a better picture of the respondents’ long term giving. It is significant to note as well that many respondents’ attitudes to ‘religious charities’ mean that they must give some considerable thought to the recipients of their giving. Many Pagans express a considerable antipathy to mainstream religion, often as a result of negative experiences in their own past, which may have a strong impact upon this figure.

I make regular donations to charity because I have a responsibility to look after others who are less fortunate.



I avoid giving to charities with specific religious connections.

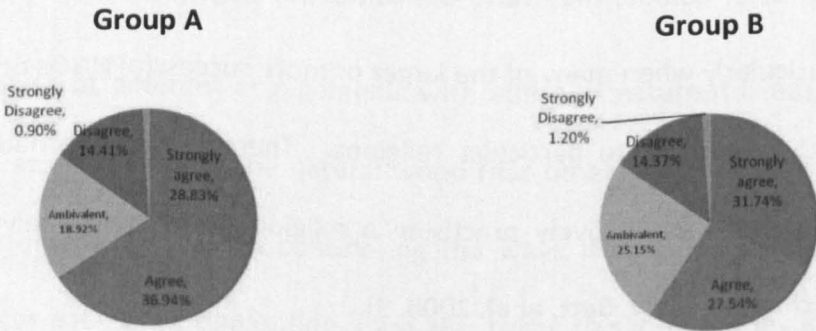


Figure 10-8. Charitable giving.

Engagement with Animal Rights

As we considered above, animal rights can often be considered as a touchstone issue when considering one's position in relation to environmental ethics, and the attitudes expressed by respondents allowed group A and B to clearly differentiate themselves in line with the scale of the two discourses of nature.

Animals represent a very useful way of examining this business of the two discourses of nature, as they play a large part throughout all forms of Paganism, and, while considered important by many Pagans, that importance can be articulated in a variety of ways: is the crow outside my window 'merely' a bird, or is it a messenger of the Morrigan, a manifestation of a/the Raven spirit, Huginn or Muninn, a psychopomp, an outward manifestation of a shamanic spirit guide, an omen? Can it be my friend? Does it have a message for me? One's approach to this will depend upon beliefs and experiences, as well as the behaviour of the crow, of course. The point here is that the animal world, in obviously expressing relational nature, is often the way by which people and Pagans are most likely to begin to make connections in an 'I-Thou' way, and if the animal in question is assigned value chiefly as a symbol, as a manifestation of the 'ontologically superior' spiritual reality, then this will place one firmly towards the esoteric end of the scale. Making a conscious effort to relate to the animal as it is, rather than as symbol, and cultivating that relationship in an appropriate way, would place one at the animist end.

When considering the 'spectrum of activism' in relation to animal rights, the picture begins to change slightly from the one to which we have become accustomed. In this specific context the usual picture of group B getting higher scores for most categories remains strong — the differences between scores (aggregates of the top three categories — regularly, often and sometimes) are often considerably higher: 20.87% for writing a letter of protest, 14.54% for forwarding an email petition, 12.11% for signing a petition, 11.86% for working to raise awareness, 8.29% for taking part in fundraising activities, 6.85% for going on a march or demonstration, 12.54% for taking part in direct action, and 1.80% for getting arrested. As usual, group A managed a slightly higher score for standing for office (1.81%), and for taking part in ritual (4.92%).

What is particularly interesting in consideration of this particular issue of animal rights is that, if we were to compare the difference between the aggregate of the top two categories for performing ritual (Figure 10.9), then a different picture would emerge, where group B would actually lead by 3.53%. This is a marked change from other areas of the survey, where this has been one of the two key areas where group A has consistently dominated. This is not to suggest, by any means, that there is any major change here (the numbers who have never done ritual in this context in group B remain higher), but this is an interesting point of difference.

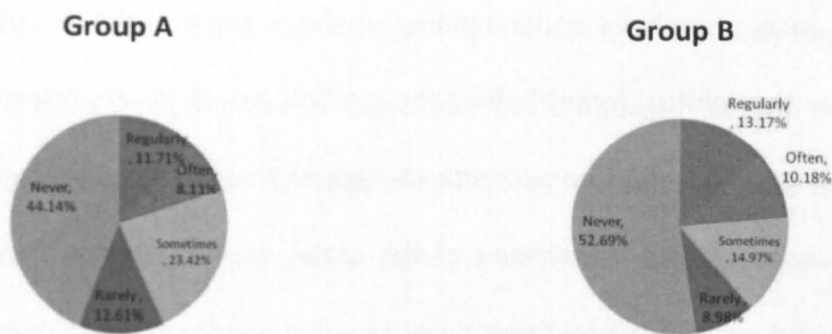


Figure 10-9. Doing Ritual in Relation to Issues of Animal Rights.

Performing Ritual

It has become apparent throughout this examination of the responses that the one area where group A have consistently 'out-performed' group B is the performance of ritual in the context of these different issues. This is worth further discussion for several reasons: firstly because doing ritual is important within Paganism (indeed is frequently used an identity marker), and because it is the most explicitly Pagan of the different possible responses. (Any other kind of activist engaged with these issues might do pretty much any of the other forms of activism but is unlikely to engage in ritual). The second reason why I think it is worth further discussion is the fact that, like the whole issue of inter-faith discussed above, this may be one of those areas where there may be difficulties with straightforward interpretation of the data.

I suggest that the perception that 'Pagans do ritual' is not entirely accurate. Many of the more public forms of Paganism including both Druidry and Wicca, place an enormous emphasis upon ritual. This is unsurprising considering their roots in the western hermetic and esoteric magical tradition. This is intimately connected with

ritual, as such a symbolic understanding of the cosmos allows the magician to manipulate the spiritual forces behind the symbols (which is very often what ritual is about). It would be more accurate to suggest that certain forms of Paganism (notably those at the esoteric end of the scale) do very formal ritual, but that formality and overt structure fades away as we move down the scale towards the animist end. Just as Wiccan ritual is more laid-back and free than that of the ceremonial magician, so the Eco-Pagan may abandon formal ritual altogether for spontaneous actions or acclamations that seek to build or celebrate relationships with the surrounding world. We can see this tendency clearly in Letcher's description of ritual on a road protest site: 'Often only a very informal ritual structure is employed, allowing the spirit of the moment to flow unimpeded by dogma' (Letcher 2000). It is also evident in Harris' call for activity with "minimal hierarchy and simple intuitive ritual that is inclusive and accessible" (Harris 2000b), and in the spontaneous libations poured at Landmatters — with acclamations of "Blessings on the land!" On one level, all these things might be described as 'ritual' although I suspect that the vast majority of Pagans at the animist end of the scale do things that an outside, academic observer might see as ritual, but they themselves might see merely as 'what I do', "how I live correctly'. As Plows describes it: "Magic isn't "out there"- it is the everyday" (Plows 2000). Given this understanding, the comparatively large numbers of group B who have never done group (17.9%) or individual (2.4%) ritual makes a lot more sense. Group B respondents would be more likely to agree with Restall Orr's definition of a ritual, when she says:

Ritual I have defined as the act of taking a break from the busy highways of our lives, pausing in order to reflect and locate ourselves in time and space, remembering that all life is sacred, that all nature is divine. Ritual can provide the opportunity where, claiming sufficient stillness to perceive, we are able to (re)connect or to deepen our relationships within our environment, whatever our theology of deity and spirit. Ritual can guide us out of complacency, apathy and blinkered complicity, into a wakeful state of honourable living once more. (Restall Orr 2000b)

Conclusions

What I have done is to identify two groups from my respondents who represent two points on the continuum between a purely esoteric discourse of nature, where nature *qua* nature is not important, but it is treasured for the insights that it can grant into interior spiritual realities; and the animist discourse of nature, from which the symbolic is largely stripped out, and where the 'I-Thou' relationship between each living thing and the next is prioritised. Group A represents a point about half way along this scale — Wicca is informed by both of these discourses, and it must also be remembered that individual Pagans, and the groups to which they belong, may be smeared along this scale, rather than being most accurately represented by discrete points. Group B are at the animist end of the scale, representing traditions that are largely or essentially informed by this perspective. I hoped to find many differences between the two, but did not expect the consistency of these results, where group B always appear to be embodying those

animist principles in both their attitudes and their engagements more effectively or fully than group A.

This is not to say, for one moment, that group A are not green (or indeed, 'not Pagan'), merely that group B are GreenER, that is they are more likely to rise to David Rankine's challenge:

As Pagans we must lead the way in caring for our environment, by recycling, by not littering, by supporting animal welfare projects, by not supporting trades which practise wanton cruelty to animals like factory farming, by practising our beliefs rather than paying lip service to them (Rankine 2000).

Indeed, both groups accept a considerable degree of personal responsibility, and therefore stand in contrast to those identified by other research:

Survey results showed a marked lack of perceived individual responsibility (only an aggregated average of 10% of people allocated individuals as primarily responsible for a range of 27 environmental issues) (Macnaghten and Urry 1998, 86).

The data that emerges from this level of analysis enables me to refine the previous comparative work triangulating between the qualitative data from the Landmatters interviews and the quantitative data from the survey. I pointed out in chapter seven the significance of the immersive experience for the attitudes and actions of the Landmatters interviewees, and considered the fact that there would obviously be a big difference between this experience and that of the survey respondents who were substantially less likely to live immersed in nature (22% of all

respondents lived in either secluded rural locations, or small rural communities). From the comparative work detailed in this chapter one might expect to see group B (who have been consistently more likely to express environmentally aware attitudes and engagement), as being more likely to share the rural situation of the Landmatters community.

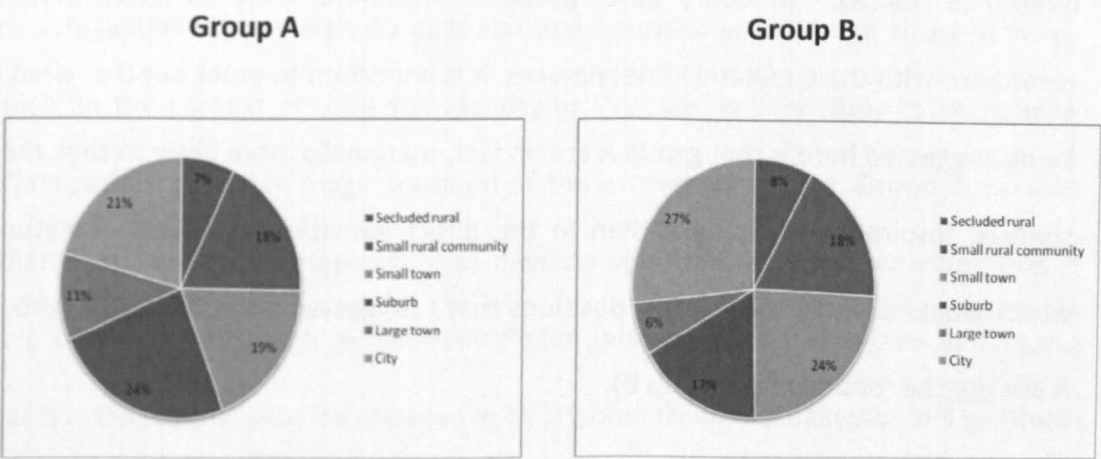


Figure 10-10. Best Description of Current Home.

When considering the comparison (figure 10.10), it becomes apparent that this is not, in fact, the case. While it is true that group B are marginally more likely to live in a rural location, the actual difference is little more than half of one percent, and, in fact, members of group B are also much more likely to live in a city. There is a significant conclusion to be drawn here, which is that, if it is not the influence of continued immersive experience that drives the consistent difference between the two groups, then another strong factor must be key, a factor that I identify as their adherence to a particularly animist discourse and approach to nature.

Both groups shared a very strong agreement with the statement that: ‘Being out in nature can be profoundly moving’ (group B were 2% more likely to strongly agree), yet when considering this experience in relation to the expression of spirituality

there were more obvious differences. Group B were much more likely to express strong agreement that they preferred to celebrate rituals and festivals outdoors (a difference of 23.84% - aggregate difference 6.05%), were aware of the spirit of place in particular locations (a difference of 16.3% - aggregate difference 1.52%), and felt a close sense of connection to the land (a difference of 18.1% - aggregate difference 4.52%). In every case, group B are more likely to share greater resonance with the qualitative interviewees. It is important to point out that what is being suggested here is that group A are, in fact, marginally more likely to seek their spiritual inspiration elsewhere than in the direct somatic experience of nature, which would support the relative positions that I suggested upon the scale. (Group A are not the 'opposite' of group B).

When examining the relative importance of the embodied activities for the two groups, there is a clear difference in the approach. Group A are much more likely to identify ritual as having had a strong influence upon their spiritual development — both in terms of group ritual (17.23 % difference), and individual ritual (10.11% difference), and, as I have discussed above, this may well be to do with differing understandings of 'what ritual is' between the two groups. They are also more likely (though not substantially) to identify yoga as a strong influence (3.34% difference). Group B are much more likely to identify other activities as having had a strong influence upon their spiritual development, notably: walking in the countryside (difference of 10.6%), experience of natural beauty (difference of 10.85%), visiting sacred sites (difference of 8.21 %), and sex (difference of 5.03%). The fact that respondents were asked to reflect upon the extent to which these activities had

contributed to their spiritual development seems to be clear evidence to support the relative positions of the two groups upon the animist/esoteric scale.

Group A are much more likely to develop spiritually through activities that seem much more closely aligned with my categorisation of *religiously Pagan*, with substantial differences on the importance of ritual. This seems to suggest that they are substantially more likely to gain spiritual nourishment through ritual activity, which, in the context of their self-identity as Wiccans, is very likely to be heavily influenced by the ritual magic tradition of the esoteric discourse. Group B, on the other hand, are much more likely to develop spiritually through activities that I have categorised as both *peripherally Pagan* (visiting sacred sites), or *un-Pagan*, that is activities that may be engaged in by anyone, though usually not in a spiritual context. This would situate them much more solidly in the animist perspective of nature, appreciating it for what it is, and taking spiritual nourishment from that unmediated encounter. This suggestion that group B have a broader interpretation of kinds of activity that are spiritually nourishing is supported by the comparative figures about daily spiritual practice, where members of group B were 7.36% more likely to have one, a figure that may be related to an animist perspective that interprets a wide range of activities as 'spiritual'.

As I have elucidated from this comparative analysis of the responses, group B are much more engaged with the world around them, both in terms of their activity and activism, as well as in terms of their open-minded approach to issues. Group B respondents are much more likely to accept that a degree of sacrifice is necessary to address environmental issues, being 10.99% more likely to strongly agree that

they would give up a portion of their income to address pollution. They are also much more likely (13.37% difference) to strongly agree that everyone has a responsibility to try and make society fairer. Group B are substantially more likely (10.12%) to strongly agree that their friends would identify them as someone committed to the environment. Throughout every category — in relation to the environment, to politics, to issues of globalisation, animal rights and genetic modification, group B's responses consistently demonstrate a higher degree of engagement.

It would be easy to use this data to theorise oppositional positions, or to support constructions that already take this position, to suggest that group A respondents represent one type of Paganism, perhaps representing Letcher's 'Virtual Paganism', or group B as another type of Paganism, perhaps Restall Orr's '**Pagan*,' but I argue that this is an unhelpful approach. In both cases this relies upon narrowing the definition of 'what Paganism is', and using this to exclude people rather than allowing the traditional (although problematic) inclusivity to persist. I think that acknowledging that there are two discourses, intertwined within the deepest foundations, will allow Pagans to be more understanding of themselves, and those within Paganism who are not like them, and to appreciate the commonalities that they share, even when they see each other as representing only difference.

At the outset I began by considering the question of the possibility of an embodied approach to ethics. I argued that a developing awareness of embodiment as a legitimate ontological paradigm was an important step towards a more open and democratic way of 'doing ethics'. *By its very nature, an embodied ethic is accessible to all and free from the specifically religious and academic hegemony of the modernist approach. Such an embodied ethic returns us to a re-enchanted world of mutual inter-relationship, allowing us to establish honouring relationships with the full spectrum of being, and to make room for the subjective interiority of other beings. Abram clearly articulates the ways in which the human experience is situated in inter-relation with nature:*

We can sense the world around us only because we are entirely a part of this world, because – by virtue of our own carnal density and dynamism – we are wholly embedded in the depths of the earthy sensuous... We are neither pure spirits nor pure minds, but are sensitive and sentient *bodies* able to be seen, heard, tasted and touched by the beings around us (Abram 2010, 63).

Once our eyes are open to this way of being, we are able to be open to the possibilities of an embodied ethic. Such an ethic is one that enables us to fully appreciate and respect an enormous spectrum of others - through the honest recognition of that which we also honour ourselves. Such an ethic would return us to Holler's perspective:

Such a moral theory would respect what we share with animals; the environment, the ability to feel pain and pleasure, and the engagement in social relations. The senses would be recognized as providing an important foundation for moral authority (Holler 2002, 11).

Such an approach, arising from common embodied experience, should be as familiar to us as touch, and thus Levinas's analogy of caress is significant.

I have argued that such an ethic is most likely to be found within the broad spectrum of contemporary Paganism. Both the emic and etic discourses of Paganism consistently agree that it is 'nature' focussed; it consciously valorises bodily practices as major keys to spiritual development, and is eclectic, creative and outward looking. I have theorised that if one is to find evidence of an embodied ethic in the contemporary world, it is most likely to be found among Pagans and their relationship with the environment, articulated in Harris' call for Pagans to "protect our Earth because we know, in every cell of our bodies, that our lives, our communities and our land are sacred" (Harris 1996, 153). This discussion of inter-relationship brings me back to the power of synchronicity — as I was editing this chapter, an email arrived from a friend with a link to an article about Paganism in the *Guardian*, the first paragraph of which ended with these words: "It's hard to adequately capture and portray the intensity of what I just experienced with words alone, since this isn't a religion of words but one of encounter and experience" (Townsend 2010).

In order to test this thesis I carried out two separate, but complementary forms of research. I conducted qualitative research, both by interviewing some key Pagan thinkers and opinion-formers, and by carrying out participant observation and interviews with members of the Landmatters community. I also conducted quantitative research through an international on-line questionnaire. My qualitative research suggested that, for some Pagans at least, an embodied environmental ethic was possible, although this was very difficult to articulate, and was strongly related to their lived situation. It was clear that some of my respondents at Landmatters were living out an embodied ethic — that their primary motivations arose directly from their lived experience, one that was focussed and charged by ritual practice:

I think what's happening is happening on a subtle level that I couldn't really describe. Just by the fact of being here, you notice things about the world, about the changing of the seasons that I've never noticed before. Like certain, subtle things, getting to know the patterns of birds and insects and things. It's like those things going on, a realisation going on. Doing the rituals is like a reminder, where we give thanks, and ask for support, and whenever I do a ritual I sort of charge up that soul part, that needs to be doing this, and remind myself what it's about, and remind myself to be grateful for what I've got — to remind myself to remember why I came here and connect with things (Ambuka 2006).

This was established not only in what they told me, but in the ways that they told their stories — through their reliance on gesture and through the activity of their daily lives as well as the words.

What I sought to do through the on-line questionnaire was to map the extent to which the experience of the Landmatters respondents might be seen as normative for the broader Pagan community. In order to do this, I had to acknowledge the fact that some within the Pagan community would actually repudiate such an environmental emphasis (and this was apparent from the first critiques of the questionnaire). The theoretical approach that I developed to deal with this was the acknowledgement of the two different, yet simultaneously held, discourses of nature within Paganism — the esoteric and the animist. The esoteric is that which is based in the western esoteric magical tradition which privileges unseen, spiritual realities over visible, somatic ones; prioritises a symbolic understanding of nature, and is propelled by Johnson's globalising trajectory (Johnson 2002). The animist is that which was originally based in the Romantic tradition, but was then empowered by the engaged Pagan activism of Starhawk and the road protest camp experience, and a new appreciation of indigenous traditions, and is propelled by the indigenizing trajectory. Many other theorists have described a perception that there are broad types of Pagans (Restall Orr, Letcher, Greenwood), but I argue that this misses the most important point of such a description, which is that all forms of Paganism are, at any given time, at a point on the scale between the two — very few can be situated entirely at either end, and thus the vast majority of Pagans' understanding of, or approach to, nature is informed by both of these two

separate, competing, and often contradictory discourses of nature. Now, while F. Scott Fitzgerald may acknowledge the ability to hold two contradictory ideas at the same time as the 'mark of a first rate mind' (Fitzgerald 2005, 139), it is more likely to be a literal cause of cognitive dissonance, and, indeed, most accounts of the diversity of Pagan understandings of nature are usually couched in the language of opposition and conflict — Letcher's 'Virtual Pagans' (Letcher 2000), or Restall Orr's **Pagans* (Restall Orr 2007, 31).

My initial analysis of the quantitative results supports the idea that there were indeed some similarities between the quantitative and qualitative data. Both sets of data suggested that the importance of embodied relationship with nature was both real and important, and that this was deepened through bodily praxis, particularly ritual. The language of environmentalism was prevalent, and enthusiasm was expressed for the ideas and attitudes, but it was also clear that this was not accompanied by a substantial degree of activism or engagement (and this on a 'spectrum of engagement' that could recognise activity running from 'writing a letter of protest' or 'forwarding an email petition', right up to 'being arrested'). That comparatively few respondents were unable to demonstrate some kind of engagement on many of these issues suggests that, in fact, the greener attitudes demonstrated are only infrequently translated into engaged action. It became clear that, while some of the features of the embodied ethic might be applicable to both Landmatters and the broader Pagan community, other aspects might be more problematic.

I performed a second degree of analysis using an approach based upon the scale of discourses, identifying three groups from their affiliations; group A (Alexandrian and Gardnerian Wiccans — who I had identified as being most likely to be equally influenced by both animist and esoteric discourses), group B (composed of Shamans, Eco-Pagans, Reclaiming Wicca, and Druids — groups who I had identified from their public rhetoric as being most likely to be most strongly influenced by the animist discourse), and group C (Thelemites, Ceremonial and Chaos Magicians, who I had identified as being most likely to be strongly influenced by the esoteric discourse). If my theory of the scale was correct, then group B's responses should demonstrate greater degrees of environmental enthusiasm and activism than group A's, and group A's in turn 'greener' than group C's. Regrettably I did not have a statistically significant group for group C, but this left me free to concentrate upon mapping the difference between groups A and B. It was quickly apparent that the predicted difference did, in fact, exist: both in terms of attitudes and engagement, respondents in group B were consistently and measurably greener than group A.

These figures demonstrate that group B participants were much closer to the Landmatters approach, sharing a deeper relationship with nature that was nourished by spiritually enriching physical praxis that was informal, and often not even particularly overtly Pagan. Group B were consistently more open to a wide range of attitudes to various issues, and substantially more likely to engage in both activity and activism to address those issues.

My research has thus demonstrated that an embodied environmental ethic is possible for some Pagans, although it acknowledges that the most profound driver

of this is a lifestyle choice that may not be open to all. It demonstrates that this approach may also be influential outside the very specific setting of Landmatters, and is more likely to be important for Pagans who are more open to an animist discourse of nature. The data supports the assertion that other Pagans might be able to engage more profoundly with such an approach by working at the particular embodied techniques that enable a deepening of relationship, which in turn may be more readily engaged by recognising that the influence of the animist approach may run, to a greater or lesser extent, throughout Paganism.

Original Contribution.

Before looking in more detail at the conclusions that can be drawn from my research, I contend that the concept of an embodied approach to ethics is, in fact, an original idea. I'm not seeking to state here that it crushes the hegemony of rationality in this area of thought, but it is giving voice to a previously mute expression of the ethical. The philosophical approach of academia has traditionally valorised the rational, intellectual approach to ethics to such an extent that the acknowledgement of any other possible approach seems counter-intuitive; but I argue that the embodied ethic, founded in a deeply-appreciated reciprocal relationship with the surrounding world does provide an alternative. This alternative is, of course; only open to those who are prepared to expend the effort to build the relationship upon which it is founded. There is an inherent discipline within the embodied ethic — an individual can't just pick up a book and agree with the argument, or be convinced by the arguments of another — it arises from the

development of a respectful relationship with the wider-than-human world, which will take both time and commitment.

The fact that I chose to undertake quantitative research in the area of Pagan Studies is important. As I have pointed out above there have been almost no quantitative surveys undertaken on Paganism, and while the Pagan Census did ask some attitudinal questions (and rather more in its next iteration), Pagan Studies is a field that has been reliant upon qualitative, ethnographic accounts for nearly all its data. As I have argued, it is significant that the difference between groups A and B, which I theorised based upon the qualitative work, has been backed up so very thoroughly by the quantitative work.

There are a number of other conclusions that can also be drawn from the findings of this research. The first of these is that there are two distinct and separate discourses of nature within contemporary Paganism, or, at least, that this construction is a more useful way of approaching it than a simple description of Paganism as a nature religion. While my approach does not detract from this understanding, it goes some way to clarifying (albeit through problematizing) the whole concept of nature in this description. The acknowledgement of different understandings of and approaches to nature by Pagans is significant in that it enables those who wish to describe or discuss Paganism (both from emic and etic perspectives) to do so with a greater degree of clarity. It is also inclusive rather than exclusive, as other attempts to deal with this dichotomy have tended to be oppositional — suggesting that ‘proper Pagans’ are really interested in nature, which, of course, suggests that ‘other [*improper?*] Pagans’ are not — such as Restall

Orr's use of **Pagan* (Restall Orr 2007, 35). Indeed, it is tempting to represent this as a holistic and more profoundly embodied approach — understanding the approach of the proper/not-proper dichotomy as being linked to the modernist world view, and its love of oppositional ontologies. My description of this dichotomy as a scale is also important — this approach is not about setting up discrete boundaries or, indeed, even about achieving some kind of crystal clarity, but about an honest and reflexive approach which acknowledges that individuals may move along the scale, and are likely to occupy different places at different times.

The second conclusion, which arises from the first, is that Pagan approaches to environmental ethics are contingent upon positions upon this scale. This means, for example, that a Pagan group whose approach to nature is predicated upon a more animistic discourse will inevitably be more likely to have a direct, somatic approach to their understanding of nature and are also more likely to understand direct engagement with the environmental as an important part of the expression of their spirituality. This is neatly summed up in Curry's description of:

the resacralization (or re-enchantment) of living nature, including human nature, in the local cultural idiom. At stake is nothing less than a new ethical emphasis upon conviviality, respect for life, and ultimate humility (Curry 2001, 269).

This new ethical emphasis emerges not from a generalised appreciation of hypostasised nature, but from direct experience, located in particular localities. The

importance of reciprocity in these relationships as the basis for ethics is emphasised by York:

It is this connection with the all of reality that ultimately is central to the Pagan, and any Pagan understanding of ethics as either the goal of life or the correct way to live life is guided and informed by this interconnectedness between the individual, the community, the world, and the cosmos (York 2010 , 82).

This is illustrated perfectly in the difference between the different categories of embodied praxis that were identified as being spiritually significant by the two groups — group A emphasised specifically spiritual or religious activities, notably ritual, whereas group B emphasized the spiritual nourishment that they gained from comparatively every-day, *un-Pagan*, activities. It is also true that this relates very specifically to engagement with environmental issues. The quantitative data supports the observation that the level of engagement drops off as groups move towards the right along the scale, towards places of greater influence from the esoteric discourse. This is not a straightforward rule by which one may conclude that ‘Druids are greener than Witches’, but does give a framework for explaining why it might be the case that ‘some Druids may be greener than some Witches (some of the time)’. Some Druid Orders may be more inspired by the esoteric discourse, and move right on the diagram; some Wiccan Covens may be more inspired by the animist discourse and move left; and in both cases this is likely to find expression in their engagement with environmental issues.

I also conclude that one's position on the scale (and thus one's ethical position) are likely to be impacted by lifestyle choice. As Letcher said: "Deciding to live in a protest camp is a Pagan act in itself" (Letcher 2000), and while Landmatters is no longer a protest camp *per se*, in many respects it represents the apogee of that lifestyle. The decision to 'live out', immersed in nature, is one that can have an enormous impact upon an individual's approach to spirituality of the land, and the ethical engagements that arise from this. The language of 'relationship' can sometimes be a little misleading in this respect. There is an extent to which we relate to everyone we meet. We have some kind of relationship with the person who brushes against us in the rush hour on the way to work. We are, though, talking about a much more profound relationship, one that is sustained by "continuity and obligation" (Feintuch 2001, 149), which, like the most profound human relationships, arise from continued shared experience, and is deepened through regular conscious and unconscious attention. Such relationships are genuinely "ties to nature which are expressive of the rich, caring relationships of kinship and friendship" (Plumwood 2000, 259).

Thus, the genuinely embodied ethic that I contend some members of Landmatters manifest arises quite literally from their somatic experience, from their day to day lives, and the close relationship that they develop with the land where they live.

Finally, I think that it is true to say that this research demonstrates that the embodied environmental ethic that is — one that is immersed in and expressed through lived somatic experience — is indeed possible, and may be found amongst people who identify themselves as Pagan. I do think, though, that the 'axiomatic

Pagan-ness' I had originally theorised to be such an important part of this situation is, in fact, less significant. This is because the most fundamental causative element is the embodied experience of living out, the prolonged direct immersion in the natural world. While the embodied approach to ethics is, as I asserted, open to all, it does take a particular kind of way of living to bring it to its fullest manifestation. Just as all beings may engage in relationship, some beings choose not to, or at least, choose not to recognise the rich community of inter-relationship in which they are situated. We might think of this as Indra's net, the web of wyrd, or, to borrow Ingold's term, the 'parliament of lines' (Ingold 2007, 5), from whose mutual interpenetration emerges the web of reality. The point is that there is a deep and profound inter-relationship where:

The relation is not *between* one thing and another – between the organism 'here' and the environment 'there'. It is rather a trail *along* which life is lived... each such trail is but one strand in a tissue of trails that together comprise the texture of the lifeworld (Ingold 2011, 69-70).

In short, the thing that I originally expected to find, an embodied ethic informing the whole spread of Pagan practice, is not present. There is, however, evidence to support a very significant embodied ethic amongst some Pagans, living in some particular circumstances, and evidence to contend that this approach is also present in the broader Pagan community, although the extent to which individuals manifest this is contingent upon their positioning on the scale of discourses.

Challenges for the future

- **Academia**

While I may not have found the clear link between Paganism and embodied ethics, there is considerable room for a much deeper exploration of this theory. In particular, there is room for a more detailed quantitative comparison between the environmental engagement of Pagans and non-Pagans. My suspicion is that, considering the primacy of the immersive experience in developing the reciprocal relationship, non-Pagans living in a similar environment to Landmatters might be more likely to demonstrate an embodied ethic than Pagans who are not living there. Although I would also maintain that there is a link between the two — that Pagans (particularly those influenced by the animist discourse of nature) have a considerable advantage in adapting to this approach. Part of the difficulty here is simply that of identity — someone who repudiates a ‘Pagan’ identity, yet is open to an embodied ethic, might well be described as being ‘Pagan’ by others.

I also conclude that the relationship between ethics and embodiment is one that might be profitably explored in other areas of Religious Studies. There are a number of approaches, particularly those that encourage a spiritual relationship through immersion within nature (sadhus, members of the forest sangha, desert monasticism, Celtic Christianity, as well as a whole host of indigenous traditional lifeways) that might further illuminate the possibilities of an embodied ethic.

- **Paganism**

It is clear to me that the current approach to discussions about nature, and about ethics, is all too often oppositional and divisive in the broader Pagan community. Those Pagans who do try to drive ethical discussion often find themselves being stereotyped as one-trick ponies. Emma Restall Orr (a very popular and charismatic speaker), has found herself being asked: "Do you have to talk about ethics again? Can't you talk about something else?" (Restall Orr 2004) This divisive approach is particularly unfortunate, as Paganism is often identified (indeed frequently self-identifies) in terms of nature. An appreciation of the ways in which the two different discourses of nature inform all kinds of Paganism might, I hope, lead to a more mature and less confrontational approach that would allow a much greater celebration of the diversity and complexity of contemporary Paganism. Adopting this point of view would allow Pagans to explore much more the intellectual heritages that they share, and break down some of the barriers that exist. This would be a chance for a more reflexive *intra-faith* dialogue, one that allows exploration of the variety within the traditions without denigration. A deeper reflection upon 'where I fit' (on the esoteric/animist scale) would potentially be of great significance for all, leading as it could to an increased understanding of where others situate themselves, and the ways in which these different points of view relate as well. This could, in turn, lead to a deeper appreciation of the whole idea of engagement — and help Pagans to understand that just because their understanding of Paganism is mainly driven by the esoteric discourse, they do not

need to reject the animist discourse *in toto*, (and vice versa) and may thus find their way to a deeper level of embodied engagement with the world around them.

Reflection

P is the passion that makes me wanna work for the healing of the Earth.

E is the earth, that conscious living being that brought me birth.

R our relationships, let's make them as loving as they can be.

M is the matrix, the interconnected web of all life.

A is for attitude, shift this and miracles can happen.

C is for creation, creation of a culture of peace.

U are the answer, within you change is born.

L is for love of course, for all beings on the earth.

T is for traps, those habitual patterns that hold us all back and

U is understanding that we're all doing the best that we can

R is for rebirth the opportunity in every spring and

E is for ecstasy for when I'm at one with everything

(Star 2005)

When I was undertaking my fieldwork at Landmatters one of my interviewees gave me a CD of her songs. Rooh is a prolific composer and an enthusiastic, skilful, and energetic performer, who obviously derived an enormous amount of joy from her songs, which, while light hearted and loving, contain profound messages. One song that I particularly enjoyed, and have revisited very often as this work has continued, is called 'Permaculture', performed over the accompaniment of a klezmer-style accordion. The chorus, (which I've quoted above) succinctly sums up all the key points of this thesis. Unshackled by the restraints of academic writing, they cut straight to the core of the experience — an impassioned call to an animist, relational ethic; a joyous, juicy, soil-smeared, celebration of a lifeway based in profound respect and love.

'Blessings on the land'.

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